

Land Use and Growth Management Analysis

Major Land Use and Growth Management Issues	3-1
Regional Setting	3-5
Prior Plans and Reports	3-5
Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan, 1993	3-5
Neighborhood Plans	3-12
Waterways Plan	3-17
North Barstow Street Redevelopment Area	3-17
Long-Range Transportation Plan	3-18
Regional Sanitary Sewer System Plan	3-18
Adjacent Communities	3-20
Pattern of Land Use in Eau Claire	3-29
Zoning Regulations	3-35
Land Use Trends and Forces	3-36
Demographics	3-36
Natural Resources	3-38
Road Network	3-41
Utilities Systems	3-44
Annexation	3-45
Redevelopment	3-45
Summary of Areas Amenable to Urban Growth	3-47
Forecast of Acreage Needed for Development	3-50
Appendix A: Summary of Wisconsin Annexation and Extra-Territorial Powers of a City.....	3-51
Appendix B: Extra-Territorial Plat Approval Powers of a City	3-52

List of Figures

3-1	Land Use Plan Map, 1993	3-9
3-2	Sanitary Sewer Staging Plan from the 1993 Comprehensive Plan	3-11
3-3	Organized Neighborhoods	3-13
3-4	Pattern of Land Use in Eau Claire County, 2002	3-24
3-5	Eau Claire County Zoning	3-23
3-6	Planning Sectors	3-31
3-7	Pattern of Land Use, 2003	3-33
3-8	Major Natural Features	3-40
3-9	Annexation Locations, 1990 to 2003	3-46
3-10	Areas Amenable to Urban Growth	3-48

List of Tables

3-1	Critical Land Use Needs Identified in the 1993 Plan	3-7
3-2	Forecast of Households, Population and Jobs, City of Eau Claire, 1990-2025 .	3-36
3-3	Forecast of Households, Nearby Cities, Villages and Towns, 2000 and 2025 .	3-36
3-4	Housing Units by Planning Sector, 1990, 2000 and 2002	3-36
3-5	Development Activity Since 1980, Annual Averages	3-37
3-6	City Size (Square Miles), 1980, 1990 and 2000	3-37
3-7	Land Use by Classification, 2002 (Acres)	3-37
3-8	Average House Sale Prices, 1980, 1990 and 2000	3-37
3-9	Forecast of Households and Housing Units, 2000 to 2025	3-50
3-10	Forecast of Serviced Land Needed	3-50

Analysis of Conditions

Land Use and Growth Management

This section of the Analysis of Condition of the *Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan* describes the pattern of land use and development with reference to the factors and forces that may influence the future pattern and policies. It reviews plans and policies of Eau Claire and of adjacent cities, villages and towns. The section begins with a description of the major land use and growth management issues.

Major Land Use and Growth Management Issues

Issues are questions to be discussed, debated and resolved during the planning process in light of the other issues.

These are the major land use and growth management issues identified through the analysis of conditions:

- 1. Regional Coordination of Growth:** Can the adjacent townships and village be persuaded to adopt a land use plan and zoning regulations that support efficient, cost-effective and compact urban expansion and disallow a pattern of small, unsewered semi-urban lots?

This is clearly the most significant planning and development issue facing the City of Eau Claire, and it is closely related to the Issue #2. If Eau Claire becomes surrounded by semi-rural lots that are too large to economically serve with sewer and water yet too small to resubdivided into urban-sized lots, there will be great costs to the City and the region. Those costs will include higher property taxes in both the City and the townships, loss of City tax base, higher private land development costs, loss of productive farmland, reduced regional competitiveness and a blurring of the visual distinction between the city and the country.

The 1993 comprehensive plan failed to result in policies or regulations to prevent semi-urban lots on the perimeter of the city, and many such lots have sprung up since then.

- 2. Sanitary Sewer System Control:** Should the City of Eau Claire change its long-standing policy and allow extensions of sanitary sewer mains outside the City without annexation to the City?

In which locations, if any, should the Regional Planning Commission be requested to expand or contract the Sewer Service Area?

While this plan was being prepared, landowners in the newly-formed Village of

Lake Hallie were seeking approval from the City to have a sanitary sewer main extended to the new Freeway 53 interchange at Melby Road to serve their commercial properties. As with the problem of semi-urban perimeter lots, sewer service without annexation would result in financial costs to the City, loss of City property tax base, loss of control over growth management, uncompensated use of City facilities and services, and increased loss of allegiance to the central city and its challenges.

- 3. Fringe Development Pattern:** What should be the pattern of land use on the City's perimeter?

The City and the land development community must determine where residential, commercial and industrial growth should occur. Eau Claire very much needs attractive locations for new housing so as to continue to attract an upper-income, highly trained work force and to expand its property tax base. High quality perimeter growth can also be helpful to revitalization of the older neighborhoods through tax base expansion. Similarly, locations need to be reserved and served for industries and businesses, without conflicting with housing, or overburdening roads or utilities.

- 4. Downtown:** To what degree should the City promote and assist redevelopment that conforms with the recommendations of the downtown plan for intensive, urban offices, housing, medical and mixed-use buildings?

The Downtown Action Plan calls for urban intensity and diversity, public investments and redevelopment, all of which require a long-term political commitment for success. The benefits of revitalizing the downtown, however, can be profound in terms of the economy and sense of place for Eau Claire. The costs of allowing the downtown to decline further can be even greater.

- 5. Riverfronts:** What should be the order of priority for the public acquisition of land along the riverfronts for public open space, parks, flood storage and trails? To what extent should the City strive to provide or require public access to the riverfront during property redevelopment?

Eau Claire has demonstrated a commitment to appropriate riverfront land use changes, including linear public parks and trails, and open space in the floodplain. Difficult improvements remain, but the beneficial effects to the nearby neighborhoods and the entire region could be great.

- 6. New Neighborhood Design :** Should the City require that new residential areas be designed with many of the features of the older neighborhoods such as sidewalks, street trees, a mixture of housing types, a mixed-use core, narrow streets, short front setbacks and garages located to the rear?

The City can guide the design of new neighborhoods through its zoning and subdivision ordinances. The visual appearance and function of the residential pattern will affect long-term property values and quality of life. Many people advocate narrower streets, use of sidewalks and street trees, interconnected streets, and reduced visual effects from garage doors.

- 7. Retail Commercial Growth:** How much land should be planned and zoned for retail business development? Should there be a major retail site in the northwestern quadrant of the community?

The major location of retail business development is south along the new US 53 freeway corridor, particularly at the expansive Oakwood Mall and vicinity, which has substantial amounts of land yet to be converted. However, the regional population continues to grow, and the realignment of and the improvement of US 29 will shift the center of the region toward the north and east. An insufficient amount of land zoned for retail business may lead to the loss of potential tax base and excessive driving to shops. On the other hand, over-zoning for business, a common occurrence, would cause land to be underutilized or stand vacant.

- 8. General Redevelopment:** How proactive should the City be in encouraging redevelopment?

In some key locations, redevelopment occurs only with the involvement of a public agency, as site acquisition and preparation is very expensive. The City is heavily involved financially in the redevelopment of the North Barstow District, which should pay great future dividends. It is a matter of public policy as to the level of risk that the City (and possibly other agencies) are willing to take to effect changes in critical locations.

- 9. Arterial Road Corridors:** What approach should the City and the County take to protect the traffic function of arterial roads and maintain their good appearances?

The number of driveways and intersections along a road must correspond with its intended function, otherwise the traffic-carrying capacity of the road will be diminished at great cost to the public.

- 10. Development on Steep Slopes:** Should urban development be entirely precluded from steep slopes through zoning or other means? Should some degree of housing be permitted on such slopes? Should zoning regulations require houses near ridgelines to be set back from the ridge or top of the hill in order to preserve the wooded horizon?

The visual appearance of Eau Claire is important to its quality of life and economic development, and the wooded hillsides in and around the city are an important component of that appearance. A few misplaced buildings can quickly ruin the appearance of a wooded slope or ridge, so effective public regulation of construction in those locations is important.

- 11. Role of the Plan:** How strong should the comprehensive Plan be in setting City policy, ordinances and budgeting?

The 1993 comprehensive plan was referenced regularly to revise the zoning ordinance, prepare small-area studies, review development or annexation requests, and to help set City budgets. Ideally, the comprehensive plan would be the central decision-making reference document for all departments of the City and for elected and appointed officials, leading to coordinated decisions supporting common goals.



The Comprehensive Plan will designate locations for residential neighborhoods with handsome homes, parks, schools, sidewalks and trees along the street.

Regional Setting

Eau Claire (French for “clear water”) is strategically located at the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa Rivers and began as a lumbering settlement in the 1840s. Eau Claire County was then the site of one of the largest stands of white pine in North America. After the depletion of the timber resources, dairy farming replaced lumbering as the main economic activity in the county and the city grew to become the major center for health and professional services, education, retail trade and industry in west central Wisconsin.

Today, the population of the Eau Claire metropolitan area (Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties) is approximately 149,000. It is surrounded by fertile agricultural land, remnants of the great pine forest and scenic lakes and rivers.

The Cities of Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls, once separated by farmland, are beginning to grow together along the new US 53 freeway corridor. Chippewa Falls is growing in size and economic importance, partially as a result of its location at the intersection of the new US 53 freeway and the upgraded STH 29, the major route across the state between Green Bay and Minneapolis-St. Paul. (Refer to Figure 1-1, Regional Location.)

Important tools for managing growth in this metropolitan area will include the regional sewer service boundary, the Eau Claire staging plan for sewer line extensions, city and town zoning, and annexation policies.

Prior Plans and Reports

The plans of the City, its neighborhoods and several adjacent communities will influence this comprehensive plan update.

Plans and zoning maps adopted by the adjacent townships contribute to compact urban growth when they guide land use for farming and very low density housing (no more dense than one house per 10 acres). Unfortunately, adjacent communities are generally planning for housing on parcels in the 1- to 3-acre range.

The 1993 Eau Claire comprehensive plan did not take a sufficiently strong leadership position on land use and zoning just outside its boundary. The result has been a proliferation of unsewered residential lots that inhibit compact, cost-efficient urban growth.

Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan, 1993

The 1993 comprehensive plan replaced a series of single-subject plans, including a city-wide land use plan. The 1993 plan greatly improved the City’s practices and policies for growth management, incorporated the plan into City budgeting and is still referenced frequently to this day. The 1993 plan:

- Updated and expanded the pattern for future land use
- Defined an Urban Service Area consistent with the Urban Sewer Service Boundary of the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

- Established the sequence in which locations should be annexed and urbanized
- Encouraged infill development
- Continued to emphasize downtown redevelopment
- Sought to improve intergovernmental relations

The plan also addressed the subjects of transportation, parks, utilities, urban design, downtown and plan implementation. The urban design (or community physical image) plan was the first time that Eau Claire systematically considered the appearance of its public works and private development.

The plan was based on the work of a 40-person committee that devised a three part “vision” for the community:

1. Preserve quality of life
2. Empower the individual
3. Transform the local economy.

Each element of the comprehensive plan was designed to implement that vision statement. The eight land use issues identified as critical to achieving the community vision are listed below along with an assessment of the City’s progress on each.



**Land for compact urban growth with utilities exists
on the perimeter of Eau Claire**

Table 1-1
Critical Land Use Needs Identified in the 1993 Plan

Land Use Need	Progress Since 1993
Revitalize the downtown	Created Phoenix Park on the riverfront and cleared a contaminated industrial site for office and other new development. Continued to expand the medical center on the west side.
Redevelop blighted areas	Isolated sites redeveloped.
Preserve and enhance residential neighborhoods	Housing rehabilitation continues in all neighborhoods. Incompatible land uses are gradually being eliminated.
Preserve historic buildings and historic districts	Historic properties have been identified and incentives exist for their renovation and preservation.
Ensure orderly planned development of new areas in and adjacent to the city	Unsewered residential lots ring the city, creating a major impediment to efficient, compact urban growth and the cost-effective extension of roads and utilities. The 1993 plan recognized the danger of this trend but failed to provide sufficient regional leadership or otherwise affect the zoning ordinances of the adjacent towns. Failure to influence this pattern is the major shortcoming of the 1993 plan.
Improve the coordination of interjurisdictional land use planning.	There is little or no cooperation on land use planning around Eau Claire.
Provide for the effective stewardship of the environment	The City continues to protect wetlands, floodplains and steep slopes.
Develop appropriate business and industrial park land	As planned, industrial growth has occurred in the Highway 124 corridor and around Oakwood Mall.

The land use goals adopted for the 1993 plan were:

1. Create a fiscally-responsible development pattern
2. Enhance and maintain the quality of life in Eau Claire neighborhoods
3. Recognize and accommodate the housing needs of an increasingly diverse population
4. Create functional, efficient and attractive business and industrial areas
5. Revitalize the greater downtown area
6. Create an environmentally sound community.

It is evident that much progress has been made and the prior plan has been instrumental in guiding the growth and revitalization of the community. However, much work remains to be done, and new needs are emerging. This plan update will provide the needed “mid-course” corrections.

Figure 3-1 illustrates the planned pattern of land use from the 1993 plan.

Growth Management Policies in the 1993 Plan

The 1993 plan was based on distinguishing urbanized from rural development and encouraging orderly staged development of the entire Eau Claire community. Key policy concerns included:

- **Distinguish Urban From Rural Development:** The expected general pattern of land use in urbanizing and long-term rural areas should be described to guide detailed planning, efficiently provide public services in the urban area, and protect the character and function of rural areas.
- **Define an Urban Service Area:** The outer limits of the area expected to become urban within the foreseeable future should be established so that land development can be coordinated with sanitary sewer service.
- **Stage Development:** Priorities should be established for the order in which locations should be urbanized and annexed to the city so that public investments in utilities, roads and drainage can be made in a cost-effective manner.
- **Encourage Infill Development:** General policies should be established to encourage their development so as to use land resources and utility system efficiently.
- **Improve Intergovernmental Relations:** The responsibilities and expectations for the City of Eau Claire and the adjacent towns and counties should be proposed.

1993 Policies

The following statements were excerpted verbatim from the 1993 plan.

1. **Planning Classifications:** The City will classify all land within and surrounding Eau Claire into the Urban Service Area or the Rural Service Area and the two will be demarcated by the Urban Sewer Service Boundary. Growth management will be done on the basis of these classifications.
2. **Urban Service Area Boundary:** The City will use the limit for the outer extension of sanitary sewer lines established by the *Chippewa Falls-Eau Claire Sewer Service Plan for 2010* as the boundary between the Urban Service Area and the Rural Area. (That plan was prepared in 1990.)
3. **Development in the Rural Area:** The City will encourage the surrounding towns and the counties to adopt and follow land use plans and zoning regulations that maintain a very-low density pattern of development in the rural areas supportive of farmland preservation (where soils are appropriate), town fiscal health, maintenance of rural beauty and the avoidance of long-term conflicts with outward municipal urban growth.
4. **Consistency with Regional Planning:** The City will incorporate the Urban Sewer Service Boundary of the WCWRPC into this plan as long as it believes that line to be adequate and fair.
5. **Extensions beyond the Service Boundary:** The City will not approve sanitary sewer extensions beyond the 2010 Urban Sewer Service Boundary unless the regional plan is amended.

Land Use Map

City Of Eau Claire

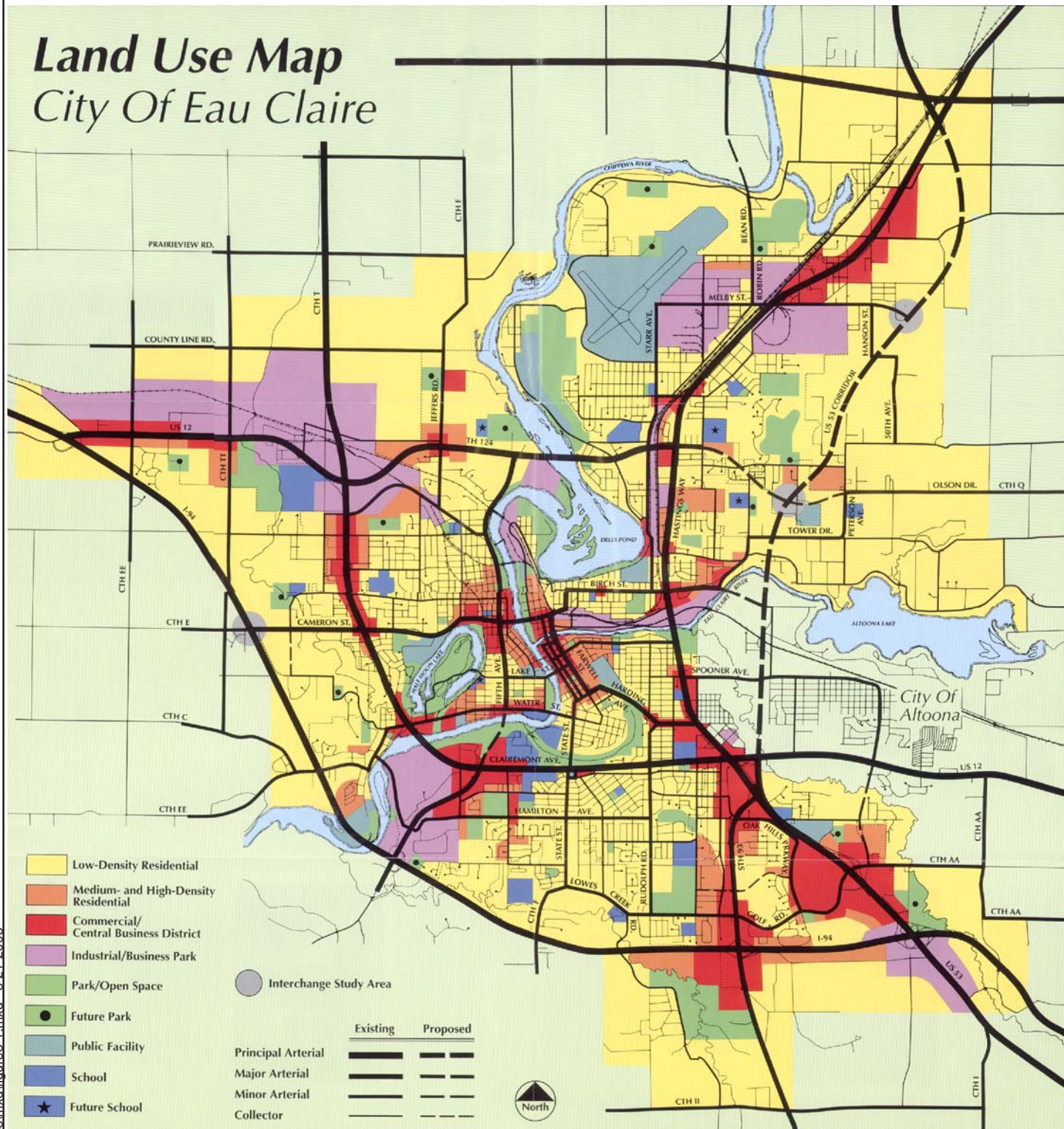
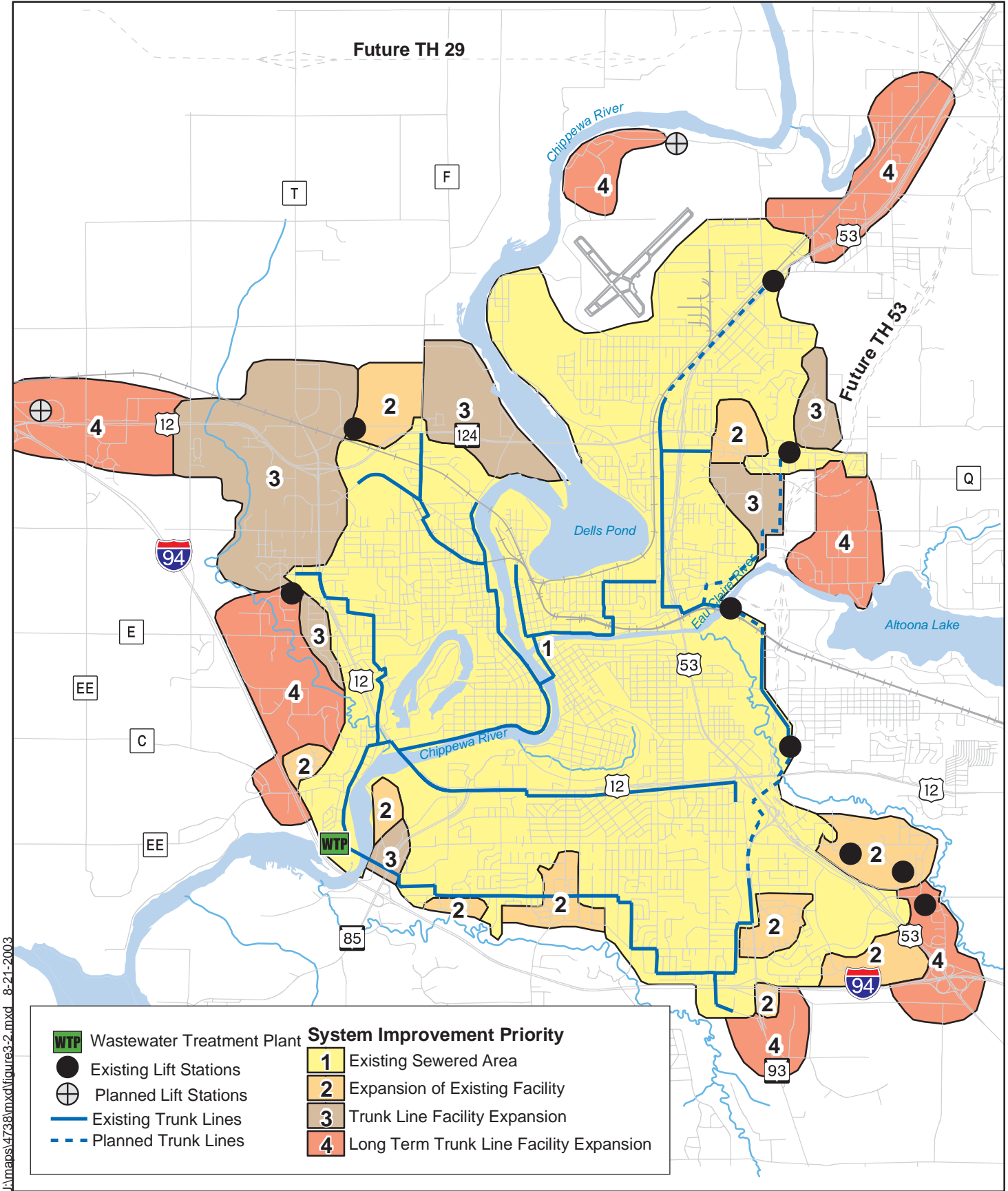


Figure 3-1

- 6. Contiguous and Compact Pattern:** The City will guide future growth within a defined Urban Service Area in an efficient and orderly manner so as to promote contiguous and compact development.
- 7. Amendments to the Service Boundary:** The City will seek to ensure that the Urban Sewer Service Boundary encompasses a generous amount of land beyond the amount needed for growth forecast over twenty years so as to maintain locational choice in the marketplace and not inflate land prices.
- 8. Extensions of Public Utilities:** The City will extend public utilities only to areas within the City and areas under agreement with the Town of Washington. The City desires that annexations occur prior to actual urban development to ensure that development is consistent with City plan, design standards and public systems.
- The sequence of utilities extensions will be consistent with the Eau Claire Year 2010 Staging Plan (see Figure 3-2). The City will give priority to utility extensions that would further a contiguous and compact pattern of development over those that would cross land not immediately expected to be built upon.
- The City will respect and protect environmentally sensitive areas as identified in the *Urban Sewer Service Plan* and elsewhere when reviewing plans for development.
- 9. Staging of Sewer Extensions:** Figure 3-2 illustrates the general sequence of major sewer extensions consistent with the regional *Sewer Service Plan for 2010*. The four levels of sewer service are:
- **Priority 1 – Existing Sewered Areas:** Areas that are currently served; no trunk line extensions needed to expand service to these areas; they can be easily served by lateral lines.
 - **Priority 2 – Expansion of Existing Facilities:** Areas that are not presently served but are included in the City's capital improvement program for minor extensions of trunk sewer and /or areas that can be easily service by lateral lines.
 - **Priority 3 – Trunk Line Facility Expansion:** Areas that are not served but are planned to receive trunk line service to accommodate development expected during the next five to ten years.
 - **Priority 4 – Long-Term Trunk Line Facility Expansion:** Areas that may need trunk sewer service for anticipated urban development are not programmed to be served in the foreseeable future.

Note that the policies listed above assumed that City sanitary sewer service would be extended only to those properties that are annexed to the City. In 1993, it was assumed that portions of the Town of Hallie would be annexed to Eau Claire.

Now that the Town has incorporated into a Village and City can no longer annex from that area, the City may wish to reevaluate its policy regarding sewer extensions into that portion of the Urban Sewer Service Area.



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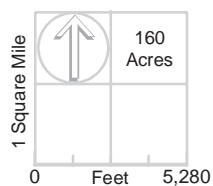


Figure 3-2

Sanitary Sewer Service Area Staging Plan, 1993

Neighborhood Plans

The City of Eau Claire has a long history of working with neighborhood organizations to prepare and update neighborhood plans. During the 1980s, such plans took the place of a city-wide plan while during the 1990s they responded to the comprehensive plan. The neighborhood plans involve residents at a “grass roots” level and provide solutions to problems that are specific to their area.

The plans summarized below indicate a concern about inappropriate land uses, housing deterioration, cut-through traffic and negative image. Each identifies strategies and actions for the City and for property owners. The process of preparing and implementing these plans strengthens the neighborhood organizations and gives them a sense of control over their destiny. Refer to Figure 3-3 for the locations of the neighborhood referenced below.

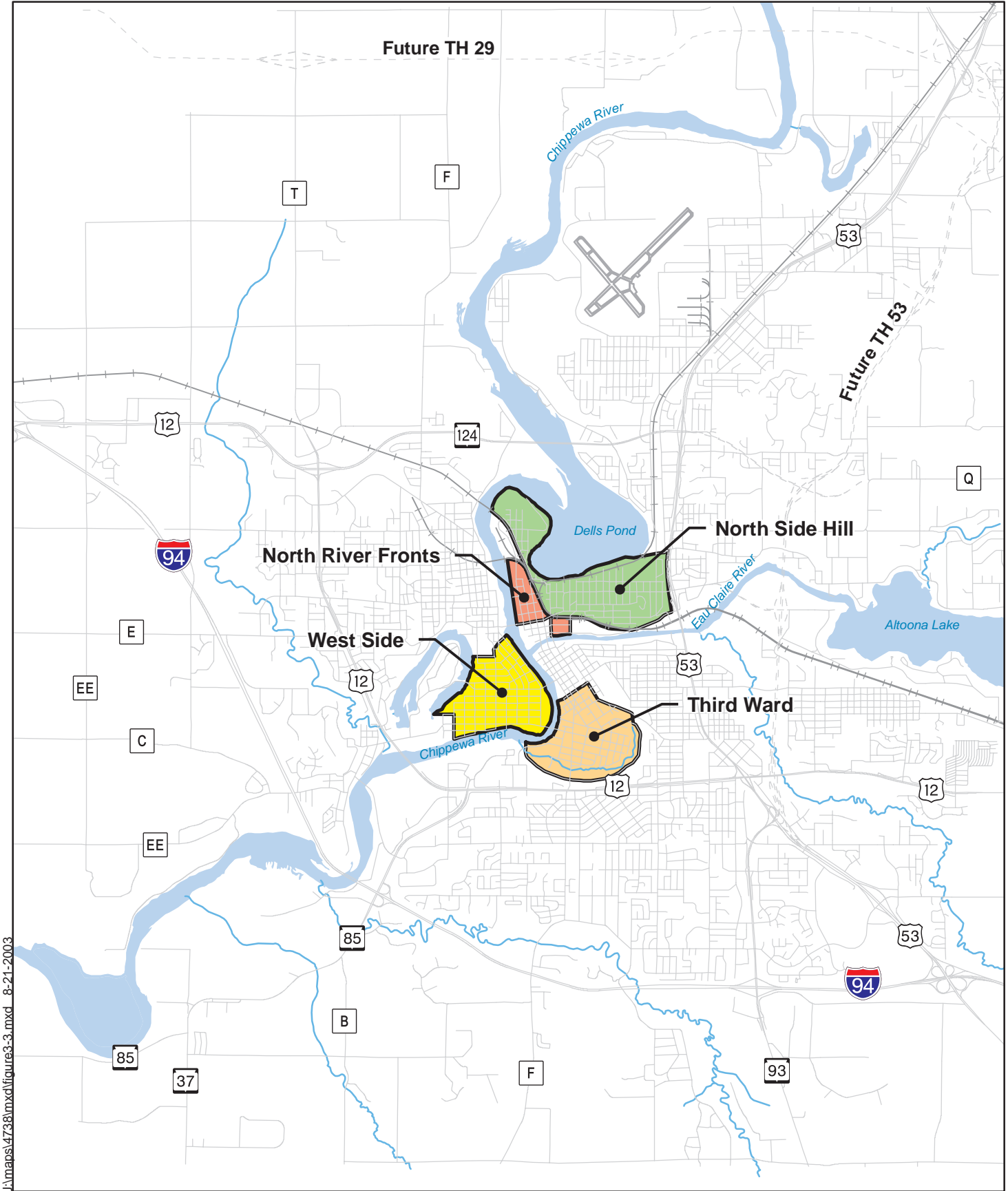
Update of the Historic Randall Park Neighborhood Plan

The Historic Randall Park Neighborhood Plan was updated in 1995 from its 1982 version and addressed problems and opportunities related to the aging of the housing stock, the conversion of many fine single-family houses to student rental buildings, general maintenance and upkeep, traffic and public facilities.

Forty-five strategies were adopted by the neighborhood association and the City to move toward the following goals.

Land Use and Redevelopment Goals:

- Effectively deal with city Code enforcement issues.
- Reverse the trend of decline in the number of families and the increase in population density. Higher density housing should continue to be guided to the periphery of the neighborhood.
- Promote the rehabilitation of housing.
- Mitigate the potential impact from facilities such as the Luther Hospital complex, adjoining commercial areas and County Courthouse on the character and safety of the adjoining neighborhood.
- Maintain the character of the Historic Randall Park Neighborhood as an inviting and affordable residential neighborhood for both owner-occupancy and rental.
- Maintain the character of the existing housing stock and encourage rehabilitation consistent with the character of the structure.
- Encourage new housing to be compatible with the height, mass and orientation of surrounding properties.
- Preserve historically and architecturally significant structures
- Encourage appropriate redevelopment that may be in the floodplain, severely blighted or inappropriate.
- Encourage new housing targeted to certain needs



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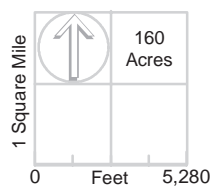


Figure 3-3
Organized
Neighborhoods

Public Facility Goals:

- Promote Lakeshore Elementary School as a focal point
- Develop new park, open space and recreational opportunities
- Continue to acquire land along Half Moon Lake for park and open space
- Provide timely delivery of City services and the repair and reconstruction of infrastructure.

Transportation Goals:

- Promote the efficient and safe movement of traffic
- Preserve and enhance the character of Fifth Avenue
- Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle linkages
- Address the need for parking for both businesses and housing
- Study issues related to impact of the proposed South Bridge.

Character and Image Goals:

- Instill a more positive image of the neighborhood as a safe and inviting place to live and shop.
- Encourage cooperative solutions to the neighborhood's problems.
- Establish a consistent streetscape and tree replacement them along the residential streets.

North Side Hill Neighborhood Plan

The North Side Hill Neighborhood Association and the City updated goals in 1997 that were originally written for the 1980 neighborhood plan. Thirty-six specific ideas were adopted to work toward these goals.

Land Use Goals:

Most of the land use problems identified in the 1980 plan have been rectified. The most significant land use issue identified as related to redevelopment of blighted properties.

- Maintain the current residential density
- Encourage families to stay or move into the neighborhood and prevent and increase in the percentage of rental units
- Improve the character of the existing housing stock
- Encourage rehabilitation of housing consistent with the character of the structure
- Encourage appropriate redevelopment of areas that are blighted or inappropriate.

Public Facilities and Services Goals:

Many concerns related to public facilities and services, including street conditions, snow removal, street lighting, transit and parks.

- Provide timely delivery of services
- Complete street improvements to bring all local streets up to good pavement index rating.
- Provide parks to meet the needs of the residents of the neighborhood.
- Maintain regular bus service.

Neighborhood Character and Image Goals:

Image is often related to improving the image of the neighborhood as a desirable place to live.

- Make the North Side Hill a safe and crime-free neighborhood

- Maintain the character as an inviting and affordable residential area and instill a more positive image of the neighborhood.
- Promote the neighborhood association as a positive and active entity working toward the improvement of the neighborhood.
- Enhance the appearance of neighborhood entryways.

Property Maintenance and Upkeep Goals:

Property maintenance was seen as a most important matter.

- Increase the involvement and commitment of absentee landlords in property upkeep.
- Aggressively enforce codes to protect the safety, property values and physical appearance.

Transportation and Parking Goals:

Transportation and parking were highly rated concerns, especially the status of the Birch-Germania arterial corridor and the impact of this east-west arterial on the neighborhood.

- Promote the efficient and safe movement of vehicular traffic.
- Enhance the character of Birch Street and minimize its adverse effects.
- Provide safe pedestrian and bicycle movement.

Third Ward Neighborhood Plan

The “vision” expressed in 2001 for the Third Ward neighborhood Plan is as follows:

The Third Ward is one of Eau Claire’s oldest neighborhoods. It has many assets including its central location, historic character, abundance of parks and natural open spaces, variety of housing choices, diverse population and proximity to the UW-Eau Claire. It has been an attractive, safe and desirable place to live since the 1800s. With its vast array of unique housing types and style, the neighborhood is one of the defining features of the form and image of the City.

Residents of the Third Ward envision that the neighborhood’s unique charm and character will be maintained and enhanced into the future. It will be a safe, vibrant and inviting neighborhood with well-maintained dwellings and yards where people enjoy parks and natural areas in comfort and safety; where traffic does not degrade the neighborhood nor conflict with walking and biking; where University and businesses enhance the residents’ quality of life and contribute to the neighborhood’s vitality; and where all residents are valued and work together to provide stability.

The neighborhood goals and the 54 implementation strategies echo this theme.

North Riverfronts Neighborhood Plan

The North River Fronts Plan was originally prepared in 1981 and updated in 1987. The City is currently updating this plan again and a draft has been prepared. The revised plan identifies several problems and issues that need to be addressed. These include: inappropriate zoning, blighted property, park and open space needs, property upkeep, several transportation issues and neighborhood image.

Sixteen draft goals have been identified to address improvement and revitalization within the neighborhood. These include:

Land Use and Redevelopment Goals

- Maintain levels of current code enforcement and quick response to resident complaints and ensure improvements in housing condition reflect the architectural character of the building and fit the scale of neighborhood.
- Promote the area to families and first-time homebuyers.
- Ensure that the zoning of the neighborhood is compatible with the existing use of parcels and also compatible for redevelopment that may be considered in certain areas.
- Encourage the redevelopment of deteriorated properties within the neighborhood, which are severely blighted, located in the floodplain or which have inappropriate uses for the area.
- Preserve historically and architecturally significant residential structures within the neighborhood.

Public Facilities

- Provide playground facilities to meet the recreational needs of the neighborhood with facilities as observed in other playgrounds throughout the City.
- Capitalize on the location of the Forest Street Recreational Area along the Chippewa River and its proximity to Phoenix Park.
- Explore alternatives to adding an extension of the Recreational Trail through the neighborhood.
- Ensure timely delivery of city services including the repair and reconstruction of infrastructure within the neighborhood.

Character and Image

- Continue neighborhood clean-ups, encourage proper disposal of refuse, and inform enforcement officials of problem properties.
- Support and encourage the Eau Claire Police Department to keep COP5 active in the area.
- Promote the neighborhood association and its activities to help build a stronger and more responsive community.

Transportation

- Slow vehicular traffic through enforcement and traffic calming measures to promote pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Minimize non-neighborhood traffic on local streets within the neighborhood.
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle linkages within the neighborhood, to downtown and recreational areas.

Waterways Plan

This 1988 plan was one of the most important ever produced in Eau Claire because it established a long-range vision for improved use of one of the city's most important assets: its two rivers and Half Moon Lake.

The plan called for the public acquisition of land along several reaches of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers for open space, walking paths, bicycling paths and flood storage. These linear parks or "greenways" should also be used to promote high-quality private land development nearby and to link inland parks and paths across the city. An important element of the pathway system would be the Chippewa River State Bicycle Trail, which would run from Menomonie (via the Red Cedar Trail) through Eau Claire and on to Cornell, a total of 63 miles of off-road paths.

More than 60 potential projects were identified and ranked as short-, medium- or long-term efforts. Many of the short-term projects have already been completed, the creation of Phoenix Park downtown at the confluence of the rivers being the most significant of them.

The 1993 comprehensive plan incorporated most of the initiatives of the Waterways Plan, and this comprehensive plan update should continue this important program.

North Barstow Street Redevelopment Area

The North Barstow Street Redevelopment Area is the northern fringe of the central business district and until recently was an uneasy mixture of deteriorating commercial and industrial buildings, apartments and single-family houses, most of which were over 75 years of age. The major former facility there was Phoenix Steel and a Northern States Power manufactured gas plant, which left polluted soil along the riverfront after it was razed in the 1980s. That problem was remediated by Xcel Energy (formerly Northern States Power) with assistance from the State. Northern States Power Company had an office building along the Eau Claire River. Major assets for this area were its location near the heart of the city and its scenic position at the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers.

Several development ideas were tested during the 1990s including a convention center and hotel, a sports arena, retail businesses, a riverfront park and a trailhead building for the Chippewa River State Trail.

The plan approved in 2002 calls for the riverfront park to wrap around the site from Madison to Barstow Streets with the trailhead building sited at the confluence point and a farmers' market plaza near Madison Street; a parkway street would run along the inner edge of the park and serve two four-story office buildings; other potential redevelopment would include an apartment building and several mixed-use retail and residential buildings. The existing Post Office building would remain.

Long-Range Transportation Plan

The *Long-Range Transportation Plan for the Chippewa Falls – Eau Claire Metropolitan Planning Area* is prepared and maintained by the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. West Central is empowered by the State to make plans for and coordinate transportation improvements while assisting cities and towns with general community planning.

The LRTP examines the entire 114 square mile metropolitan area and coordinates the planning of US Highways, State Trunk Highways and County Trunk Highways for a 20-year period. Recommendations are also offered for the Eau Claire Transit System as well as the state, county and local bicycle systems, pedestrian facilities, air transportation, freight rail, intercity bus and freight transportation. The plan includes a listed of needed road improvements, by priority, cost estimates, and potential funding sources. Recommendations are made for local land use planning since development directly affects the transportation system. The LRTP was last updated in 1997, and another revision is expected to be completed by 2005.

The major planned projects in the City of Eau Claire that might affect the land use pattern are:

- A new interchange at I-94 and Cameron Street
- Completion of the realigned 53 Freeway
- Connection of the North Crossing to the new US 53 freeway
- Expanding STH 93 to four lanes from I-94 to CTH II
- US Highway 29 completion in the Village of Hallie (east of the Chippewa River)

Regional Sanitary Sewer System Plan

The West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission has prepared the *Chippewa Falls – Eau Claire Urban Sewer Service Plan for 2010*, a document that meets the requirements of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The purpose of this plan is to:

1. Project future needs for sewer service and establish the geographic extent of the sewer service areas for the year 2010.
2. Provide technical data for designing cost-effective and environmentally sound sewage treatment configurations
3. Define the procedures for reviewing boundary and plan amendments
4. Identify sensitive environmental areas and protect them from development
5. Guide government interaction and be used to prepare community plans.

Acres Estimates: The plan estimated the amount of land that would be needed to accommodate development out to the year 2010 based on a forecast of households and jobs, minus the land that should be protected for environmental purposes. The analysis considered major undeveloped areas within the Cities, both sewer and unsewered, and planned land use from local plans. The average and peak total sewage flows to each major sewage line (called interceptors) was estimated along with the average daily and peak flows to the two treatment plants.

Unfortunately, there is far too little acreage within the Sewer Service Area because:

1. There was no acreage factor include to provide “extra” land. That additional land would allow market competition to constrain costs and would send a signal to Town planners about which locations are expected to become urban and should be zoned appropriately.
2. Much of the Sewer Service Area is being consumed by large-lot semi-rural, semi-urban housing lots at a rapid rate.

Boundary Adjustments: The Sewer Service Boundary was adjusted outward in five locations to accommodate growth. Three of those benefited Eau Claire:

1. Near US 124 and County Highway T in the Town of Union
2. South of I-94 near State Trunk Highway 93 in the Town of Washington
3. In the western part of the Town of Seymour

The revised Sewage Service Boundary was reflected in Eau Claire’s 1993 comprehensive plan.

The plan also examined several alternatives for regional sewage treatment plans and concluded that using the existing two sites (one in Eau Claire and one in Chippewa Falls) would be the most cost-effective.

Please refer also to the subsection entitled land Use Trends and Forces, Utility Systems, for a description of the sewer service extension policy of the City that is related to the *Urban Sewer Service Plan for 2010*.

Adjacent Communities' Plans

The City of Eau Claire is bordered by one city, one village and four townships:

- Cities: Altoona
Chippewa Falls (nearby but not adjacent)
- Village: Lake Hallie
- Towns: Union Burnswick
Washington Seymour
Wheaton

(Refer to Figure 1-1, Regional Location, and Figure 3-4, Pattern of Land Use in Eau Claire County, and Figure 3-5, Eau Claire County Zoning.)

The towns and villages each have plans that allow very-large lot housing without public sewer or water service. Most of these semi-rural lots are located within three miles of the City for easy access to the jobs, schools, entertainment, parks and other benefits of Eau Claire. They are all too large to be economically served with public sewer and water lines but usually too small to be easily resubdivided into urban-sized lots. Although wooded sites are preferred, some are located on open fields or prime farm land.

This practice of very-large-lot housing is potentially very damaging for the City of Eau Claire, the county and the metropolitan region. The negative effects are already being seen.

- A wall is being formed around the City that is choking off the outward extension of public utilities, increasing the cost of housing and infrastructure, pushing urban growth to less efficient locations, and causing further semi-rural platting.
- The County and the metropolitan area will become less competitive for new housing and jobs as costs rise and efficiencies are lost.
- Rural roads are becoming overburdened with traffic.
- Water quality may be degraded by surface runoff and, potentially, septic tank effluent.
- Farmland is being lost
- Rural character is being lost
- Service costs and property tax rates will rise sharply as the Towns become caught between the low service and low demand rural environment and the high service - high tax base urban environment.

Thus, the major issue confronting the City of Eau Claire in this comprehensive plan is how to gain agreement from the adjacent towns and village to plan and regulate for compact, efficient urban growth.

Chippewa County

City of
Eau Claire

94

94

Land Use

Agriculture

Commercial

Industrial

Public/Quasi Public

Residential



0 1 2
Miles

Figure 3-4

**Pattern of Land Use in
Eau Claire County, 2003**



City of Altoona

The City of Altoona, Eau Claire's neighbor to the east, expects moderate but steady growth, adding approximately 1,000 households over the next twenty years. Almost all of the growth is expected to occur on the east and southeast sides of the present city through annexation petitions from landowners in the Town of Washington. Altoona hopes to see the Town regulate land use on its periphery to maintain a very low density of housing, such as one or two houses per 40 acres, so as not to impede economic and efficient urban expansion as well as to protect farmland. The City anticipates that Otter Creek will be the boundary with the City of Eau Claire.

Although most east-side growth is expected to be low-density housing, Altoona has a major opportunity for non-residential growth around the future interchange of the new US Highway 53 and Birch Street (extended across the river). This site, located near the Eau Claire River and almost entirely undeveloped, will suddenly become easily accessible from local and regional traffic. It appears to have potential for retail businesses, offices, hotel with conference facilities and multiple-family housing, all in a master-planned environment. It will be incumbent on the City to plan and regulate land use here for its own sake and the benefit of the region.

City of Chippewa Falls

The Chippewa Falls comprehensive plan, updated in 1997, calls for expansion on the southern side of the community, taking advantage of the improvements to 53 freeway and State Trunk Highway 29. There would be a major commercial-office-industrial area near the interchange of those two highways, with housing to the north back to the existing urban area. Another office park is planned for the location of the former County Farm near the current STH 29 and the planned Cray Boulevard. Other housing growth is also shown on the western and northern sides of the city. Several major new parks are planned, especially along the Chippewa River and Duncan Creek. Unfortunately, the plan also expands the wasteful semi-urban / semi-rural pattern that has been started in the Village of Lake Hallie.

Village of Lake Hallie

The Village of Lake Hallie lies between the Cities of Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls. Until 2003, it existed as the Town of Hallie, but it incorporated to stop land annexations into the adjacent cities and, thus, protect its integrity. Territorial integrity was cited in its 1997 comprehensive plan as vital to being able to conduct service and facility planning and to protect its tax base. Important features to the Village are its ability to control its destiny, preserve its identity and grow as a community.

The Village is presently composed of a variety of businesses strung along US 53 (Hastings Way), a few industries, very large-lot single-family houses with on-site sewage systems and farmland. The Village abuts the Chippewa River on the west and is divided by a major ridgeline.

City of
Eau Claire

94

94

Zoning

Agriculture

Commercial

Industrial

Forestry

Residential



0 1 2
Miles

Figure 3-5

Eau Claire County
Zoning, 2003



A major physical planning factor is the upcoming realignment of 53 freeway to approximately one mile east of its present location and just east of the wooded ridgeline. This investment by the State will create new commercial development sites in the Village and elsewhere along its route. The present US 53 is near capacity, and most of the land along it has been occupied by businesses, industry or housing.

Although the Village does not have public sanitary sewer service, it is within the Urban Sewer Service Boundary. The Village expects to grow by using on-site systems and possibly building its own sewage treatment plant.

Part of the Village is served by a public water system that was installed because of the groundwater pollution created at the former National Presto manufacturing plant located south of Melby Street and east of 53 Freeway. .

According to the 1997 comprehensive plan, the Village (then a Town) expects to add 683 people by the year 2015. The Town estimated that approximately 183 acres would be needed to accommodate this growth, an average of two-thirds of an acre per household. Based on past trends and the unavailability of public sanitary sewer service, that density estimate is probably too high. Commercial growth could be much more substantial because of the greatly improved regional access provided by the new US 53 freeway.

The Hallie land use plan (1997) calls for the Village to be divided by the major ridgeline, with agricultural and large-lot unsewered housing to the east, businesses between the current and future US 53 alignments, industry around the interchange of Highways 53 and 29, and very-low density housing in the remainder of the community. Some floodplain open space would be protected along the river.

Town of Washington

Location: The Town of Washington lies to the south and southeast of the City of Eau Claire and is composed of interlaced ribbons of wooded hills, productive farmland and wooded creek valleys, a landscape that provides many attractive home sites. Portions of the Town are urban-density “islands” surrounded by Eau Claire or Altoona north of I-94 that lack public sewer or water service. The Town plan acknowledges the public health danger associated with relatively small-lot housing served only by septic tanks and wells.

Farmland occupies 70 percent of the land area of Washington, although not all of that land is highly productive for agriculture.

Population: The population of the Town has grown rapidly over the past 20 years as hundreds of acres of farmland have been split into very large residential lots with private septic systems and wells. As of 2000, there were 6,995 people and 2,555 households in Washington, up approximately 17 percent from 1990. Washington has the highest median household income of any community in the region.

Growth: Much of the town growth has been in the Highway 93 and Lowes Creek Road corridor, which provides easy access to employment, schools, shopping, entertainment and parks in Eau Claire. Many expensive houses have been built in Washington Township, continuing the trend toward the south side of Eau Claire being the favored direction for housing growth. Many of those houses might otherwise have been built in Eau Claire.

Urban Sewer Service Area: The Urban Sewer Service Area extends slightly into northern Washington Township, including small areas south of I-94 and east of US 53.

The portion of the Town north of I-94 has public sewer and water service from the former Washington Heights Sanitary Sewer District. That area is now serviced by the City of Eau Claire through a 1984 agreement with the Town.

The Town's plan acknowledges that half of the 5,900 acres of the Town within the urban sewer service area boundary is considered developed, much of that development occurring on 1- to 1.5-acre lots or larger, as required by Eau Claire County's rural zoning regulations. The plan acknowledges that "these areas of existing development are not economically efficient to serve with municipal sewer and water because of their larger lot size, yet do not lend themselves to resubdivision to accommodate a higher density development."

Future Land Consumption: If future housing development in Washington were to average 3.0 acres per unit, another 2,200 acres would be consumed by the year 2020. However, the forecast growth of 700 more houses by 2020 could be accommodated on the 1,230 acres of platted but undeveloped property, 60 percent of which is located within the Urban Sewer Service Area.

It is also expected that the great majority of future commercial or industrial development will occur in the US 93 corridor and within the Urban Sewer Service Area.

Land Use Plan: The Town feels that the current pattern of development is an acceptable trend for the future. In its plan, the Town acknowledged the negative impact of the current development pattern on the land supply of the Urban Sewer Service Area but hopes for a cooperative interjurisdictional solution to the problem.

The Washington comprehensive plan includes these land use policies that may pertain to the Eau Claire plan:

- **Housing in the Sewer Service Area:** Residential development with the Eau Claire Urban Sewer Service Area should be compatible with the urban development standards and coordinated with the availability of municipal sewer and water service.
- **Undeveloped Lots:** The Town Board should continue to consider the availability of undeveloped lots in existing platted subdivisions when reviewing new subdivision proposals.
- **Contiguous Housing Growth:** Future residential development should occur adjacent to existing development to encourage infill of residential development on vacant lands in order to promote compact, contiguous growth and maintain lower infrastructure and public service costs.
- **Rural Housing:** Rural residential development outside the Urban Sewer Service Area shall have a minimum lot size of 1.5 acres or large to try to ensure adequate service by on-site sewer and water systems where they are permitted.
- **Commercial Development:** Commercial development in the Sewer Service Area should be compatible with urban development standards and coordinated with the availability of municipal sewer and water service.

Town of Brunswick

Brunswick is located to the southwest of Eau Claire, west of Washington Township, and shares only a very short border near State Highway 37 with the City.

Natural Features: Many locations in Brunswick are composed of steep slopes, wooded open space or creek valleys. Only a small percentage of the town is classified as having soils prime for agriculture. Many locations have soils and/or slopes that are rated as poor for on-site sewage systems. Most of the land between the Chippewa River and Highway 37 within two miles of Eau Claire is floodplain.

Existing Land Use: Land use along the Highway 37 corridor is presently open or gravel mining between the highway and the Chippewa River or large-lot housing and wooded open space east of the highway south of I-94. Overall, 64 percent of the land of the town is devoted to farming. Housing is limited to large-lot unsewered properties scattered across the town, mostly along the county or town roads. There is almost no commercial development, and most of the industry is devoted to gravel mining near the Chippewa River, especially in the northeastern corner of the town near Eau Claire. The Chippewa Valley Bicycle Trail runs through Brunswick along a former railroad grade roughly parallel to the Chippewa River and leads to downtown Eau Claire.

Population: Population growth has been relatively slow but steady in Brunswick since 1990, increasing approximately 6 percent to 1,600 in the year 2000, as the population is shifting from a farming to a rural commuter population. Thus, Brunswick has seen the least amount of housing growth of any of Eau Claire's neighbors. Another 300 persons are forecast for Brunswick by the year 2015, which represents approximately the same rate of growth as experienced in the 1990s.

Land Use Plan: The land use plan for Brunswick calls for approximately two-thirds of the town to be devoted to farming, one-quarter to mixed farming and housing (mostly along the State Highway 37 corridor) and less than 5 percent to be used for large-lot housing.

The land closest to Eau Claire, south of I-94 and east of Highway 37, is designated as large-Lot Residential, which would create a barrier for serviced urban expansion.

The owners of the large gravel mine west of Highway 37 were preparing a plan for the development of their property after the mining operation is retired.

Town of Union

The Town of Union borders Eau Claire on the west and includes property immediately north of Highway 124 (the North Crossing) and east of I-94.

Land in Union Township is gently rolling except for areas near the Chippewa River, which are steeper. One of the major streams in the town is Sherman Creek, which runs in a steep valley east of I-94. That creek and the Chippewa River have practically the only floodplains in the town. Likewise, the only significant locations of wetlands is in the far northwestern quadrant of the town.

Small forest and woodlots dot the town but are mostly found along the streams and rivers and in the western portion of the town.

Approximately half of the sites in the town have moderate to severe soil limitations for on-site sewage systems, especially sites in the valley that slope down to the Chippewa River. The pattern of soils rated prime for farming is highly varied. A band of productive soils runs along the Cameron Street (County Highway E) corridor.

Most of the land in the town is devoted to farming and other types of open space. However, many half-acre or one-acre residential lots have been platted or split on the edge of Eau Claire, particularly east of I-94 or along County Highways E, C or EE. Most of Union's semi-rural residential lots are located near Eau Claire for easy access to the city's jobs, schools, shopping, parks, public facilities and other urban benefits. Such lots are too big to be economically served with public sewer and water lines but too small to be resubdivided into City-sized lots. Other similar subdivisions are planned.

Commercial and industrial development has occurred east of I-94 and north of State Highway 124, including the Menard's warehouse complex and headquarters, auto-serving businesses, vehicle sales, general retail sales, and industries requiring outdoor storage. The zoning regulations for the Town of Union, which are administered by Eau Claire County, require a lower level and quality of site improvements for business or housing than do Eau Claire's regulations.

The town population shrunk from 1990 to 2000 by approximately 50 people as some locations have petitioned for annexation to the City.

I-94 divides Union but there are a few crossings near Eau Claire: :

- State Trunk Highway 124 (The North Crossing)
- County Highway E (Cameron Street)
- County Highway C (Crescent Street)
- County Highway EE (North Town Hall Road) – runs north-south

Folsom Street (County Highway CC) is aligned to cross the freeway but there is no bridge.

The City of Eau Claire and highway planners from the State and the County have been discussing the need for an I-94 interchange at Cameron Street for several years. That access point would relieve The North Crossing and improve access to the downtown and other parts of Eau Claire.



Some unsewered, large-lot housing on the edges of Eau Claire impedes compact urban growth with utilities.

Town of Seymour

The Town of Seymour, located to the east of Eau Claire north of Lake Altoona, plans to remain exclusively residential and agricultural. Unfortunately, Seymour's zoning, which is administered by Eau Claire County, allows for ½-acre and 1-acre lots. That zoning in combination with the attractive terrain has resulted in numerous semi-rural lots in the western half of the Town. The western half is still largely rural and agricultural but change is occurring there, also.

Town of Pleasant Valley

South of the Town of Washington, just two miles from Eau Claire, is the Town of Pleasant Valley, which has been especially aggressive about promoting very-large-lot unsewered residential subdivisions.

Town of Wheaton

The Town of Wheaton was starting to prepare its first land use plan in 2003. Its zoning map shows scattered residential sites for parcels in the 3-acre range across the township. The Town is said to be considering a linear pattern of commercial and industrial development along both sides of County Trunk Highway T from the future US 29 down to the City of Eau Claire and unsewered residential subdivisions near the Chippewa River.

Pattern of Land Use in Eau Claire

This section describes the **current** pattern of land use in the City of Eau Claire.

A generalized map of the pattern of land uses presented by Figure 3-7 based City Assessor records and field checks by the City of Eau Claire. .

The predominant land use in the community is, of course, housing, which has spread over the decades from three or four neighborhoods abutting the central business district to larger neighborhoods primarily to the south, west and northwest. Directions of growth have been influenced by the rivers and the major roads.

Refer to Figure 3-6, Planning Sectors, for the boundaries of the six districts described below. (These districts were defined only for the purpose of description in this plan and have no other official status.)

Northwest

Growth in recent years has been shifting to the northwest from the southern part of the community because of the improved access provided by the North Crossing (State Trunk Highway 124). Office and industrial development has led the way with many new facilities near intersections along the North Crossing, especially the Gateway Business Park at County Trunk Highway T.

This annexation and urban investment has sometimes come over the protests of Union Township, which has allowed a semi-rural pattern of unsewered housing on small lots in the 2010 Sewer Service Area. Fortunately, the Town of Wheaton in Chippewa County one mile beyond the North Crossing, has maintained a rural pattern of land use.

Residential neighborhoods are beginning to sprout both north and south of the highway. With the extension of roads and utilities to the northwest, it is anticipated that the next several decades will witness continued strong expansion onto these low hills of the upper Sherman Creek valley.

To complement those neighborhoods, the City has been building neighborhood parks as well as acquiring a large community park on the river bluff just beyond the North Crossing, consistent with the 1993 plan. The upper river valley is very scenic and could provide magnificent house sites behind the bluff, and riverfront park locations. Unfortunately, a high tension power line runs east-west all the way across the community just south of the North Crossing, with a substation near the river above Dells Pond.

West

The Cameron Street corridor and the vicinity of Sherman School and Park has been the scene of new subdivisions of detached housing during the 1990s as the last large tracts of land on the southern perimeter north of I-94 were developed. Other housing can be expected to spread up and down the Sherman Creek corridor in the first decade of the new century. Unfortunately, some prime urban expansion land within the freeway ring has been spent on unsewered large-lot, semi-urban housing in Union Township.

This plan update should investigate the need for and feasibility of neighborhood growth west of I-94 including commercial and multiple-family residential growth around the planned Cameron Street interchange with I-94. The topography and development pattern lend themselves to that logical expansion. Cameron Street would have to be upgraded east of the freeway, and County Trunk Highway CC probably should be extended over the highway to improve access. This growth would involve an amendment of the Sewer Service Boundary and a study of how to provide that utility and water.

South

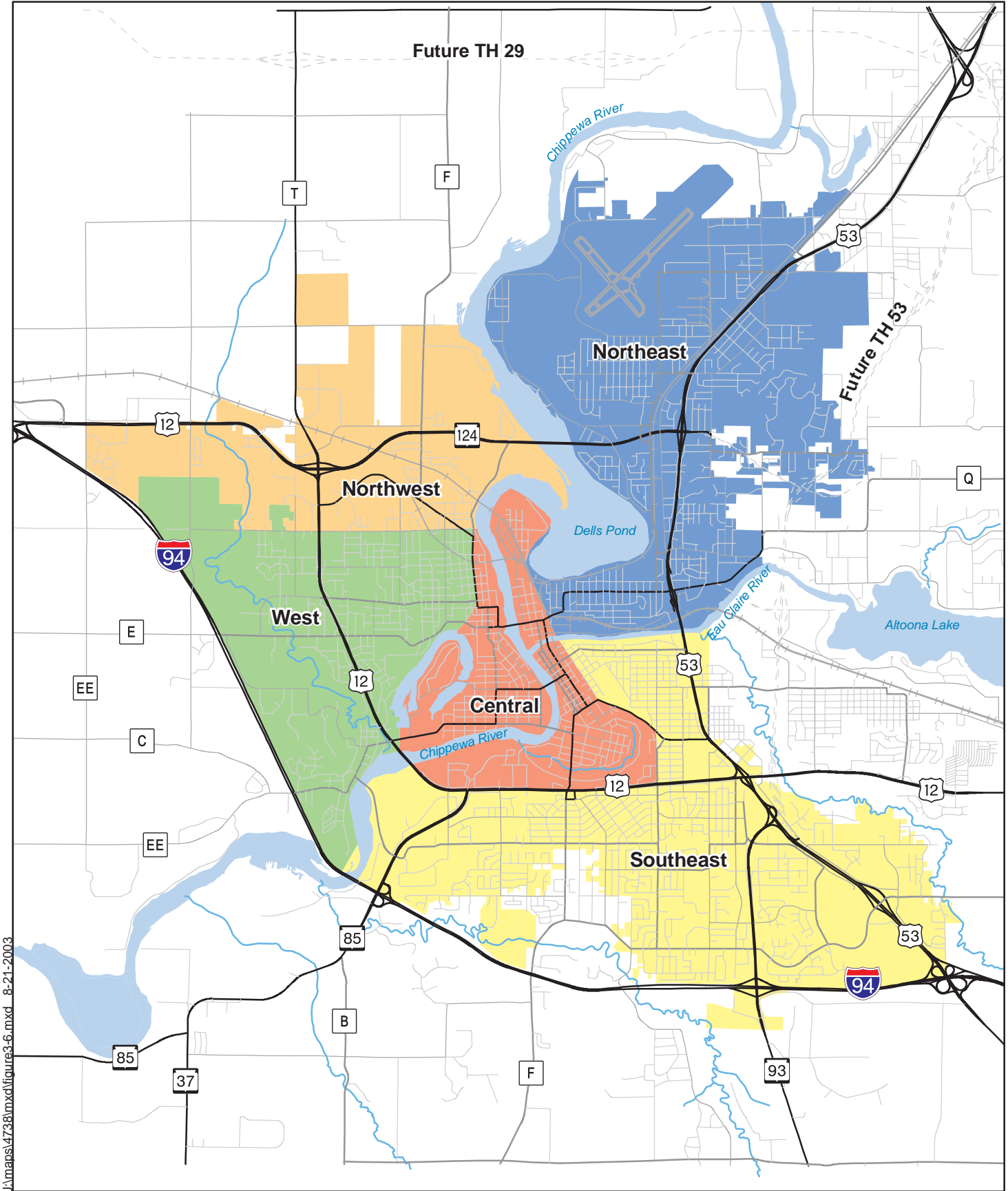
The area between Clairemont Avenue and I-94 has been a major location for community development since the 1950s and now includes many fine neighborhoods, strong commercial areas, parks, schools, a business park and open space along Lowes Creek. The freeway and its nearby steep, wooded hills have long served as an edge to the community. Presently, the drive along the freeway down into the Chippewa River valley then along the green hills presents a very positive image of the community.

Most large tracts here have now been occupied, so pressure is building to extend the pattern south of I-94. However, several factors have combined to slow growth in that direction. These include the relative shortage of direct minor arterial roads across or under the freeway, the total lack of sanitary sewer service, the difficult terrain and the pattern of large, semi-rural lots.

Features that aid southerly growth include the fact that the Lowes Creek valley is within the 2010 Sewer Service Area Boundary and can be served from the Lowes Creek Interceptor Sewer. Another is the planned widening of State Trunk Highway 93.

Once south of I-94 in the Highway 93 corridor, it will probably be more feasible to move east rather than west. Gunnes Road could be extended to County Trunk Highway I for access. Lowes Creek and the large-lot land subdivisions interfere with movement to the west.

In the Hendrickson Drive (Highway 85) corridor to the southwest, there is open, developable land on the terrace above the floodplain. Some of this property is still being mined for sand and gravel, and the only connection back to the rest of the community is along Highway 85.



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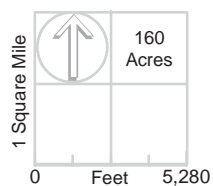


Figure 3-6

Planning Sectors

Southeast

There is a relatively small amount of land in the 2010 Sewer Service Area between the new US 53 freeway and Otter Creek both of which constrain access to this part of the City and the Town of Washington. The City has provided by agreement sanitary sewer service to this part of the Town of Washington.

The City of Altoona has plat review over the territory between Otter Creek and Altoona Lake. The City purchased the land near Otter Creek for Southeast Community Park from the City of Altoona.

Northeast

The northeastern quadrant of the urban area along both sides of Hastings Way (US 53) is an uneasy mixture of sewered and unsewered housing, businesses and industry. The sector is further divided by a railroad line along the highway, a spine of steep wooded hills, the new US 53 freeway and a major east-west power line. Jurisdiction is shared among the City, Seymour Township, the newly-incorporated Village of Lake Hallie and the Counties of Eau Claire and Chippewa. Sanitary sewer service is provided only in the City, but the 2010 Sewer Service Area extends approximately three miles east of Hastings Way.

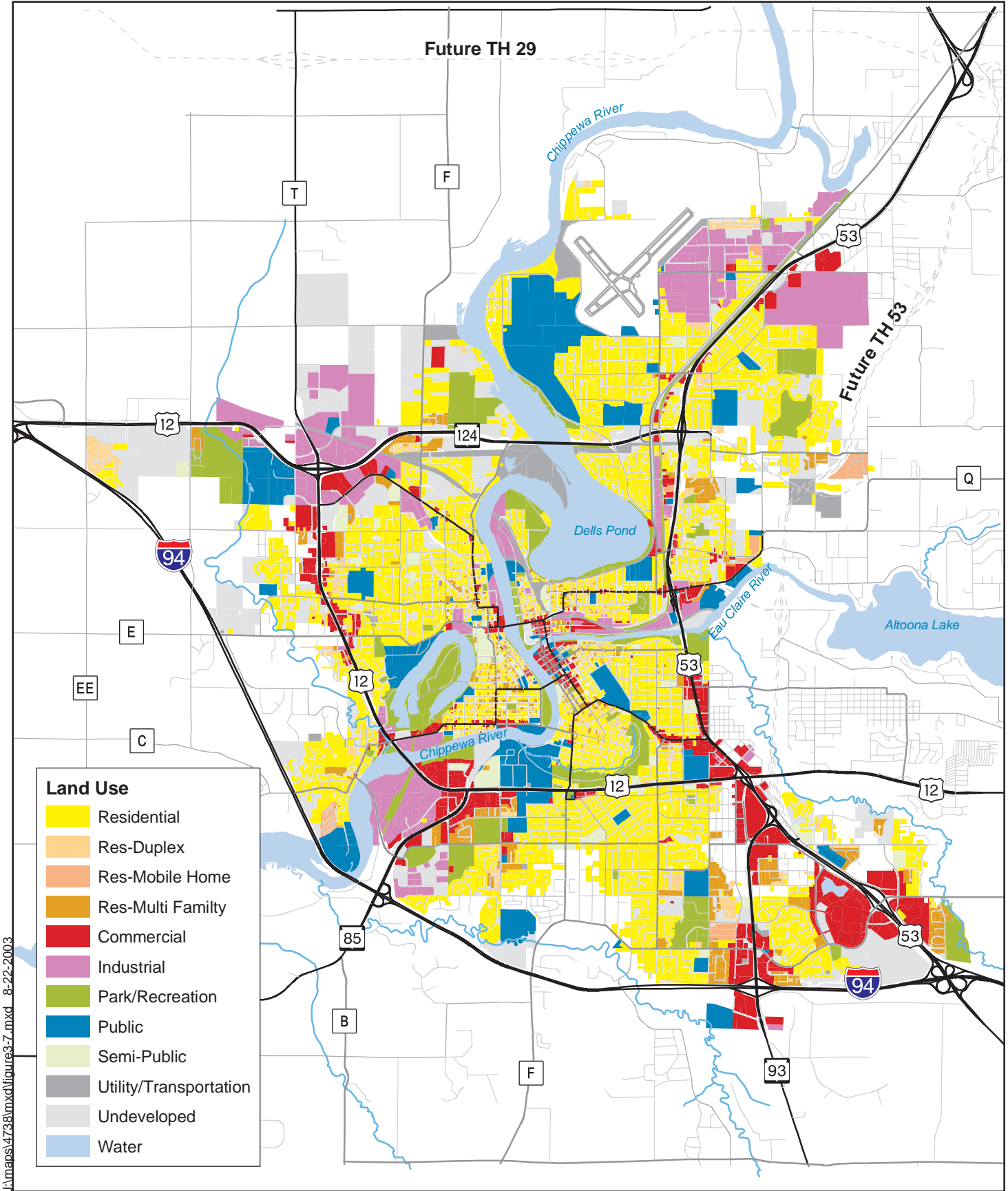
The City at one time expected to promote orderly urban investment and development of all of this quadrant but the incorporation of the Village will preclude sewer service into Chippewa County. Seymour Township, located to the south, is generally agreeable to landowner annexation petitions.

The traffic function of Hastings Way has been diminished by an excessive number of driveways and street intersections for strip commercial and industrial development in the northeast part of the region. Most of these establishments face the highway and are served by frontage roads or direct access, as opposed to being oriented toward local streets. The overall appearance of the development along this corridor leaves room for improvement, as it has mostly been subject to only Town standards.

Central

The Central Planning Sector consists of Downtown and the adjacent residential neighborhoods located generally between Dells Pond on the north and Clairemont Avenue on the south, Half Moon Lake on the west and Hastings Way on the east. Downtown can be conceived as four districts:

1. Historic Waterfront: the central retail and office core located southeast of the confluence of the rivers
2. North Barstow: the former industrial area north of the Eau Claire River
3. Medical Center: the vicinity of Luther Middlefort-Mayo Medical Center plus the upriver industrial area
4. Courthouse: the vicinity of the County Courthouse and the Grand Avenue commercial cluster.



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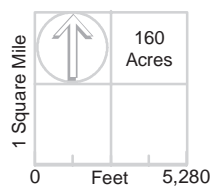


Figure 3-7
Existing Land
Use, 2003

The broad land use pattern in the Central Area is fairly well established but there are plenty of opportunities for minor reorientation, spot redevelopment and infill growth.

Land use changes and other improvements in the residential areas are recommended by four neighborhood plans, which are described elsewhere in this chapter:

- North Side Hill Neighborhood Plan
- Historic Randall Park Neighborhood Plan
- Third Ward Neighborhood Plan
- North Riverfronts Neighborhood Plan

Generally, the interest of the residents of the central neighborhoods is to:

- Protect and improve the quality of their living environment by correcting the abuses that occurred (often in the 1960s and 1970s) as a result of rezoning to allow multiple-family buildings in single-family detached blocks
- To complete the evolution from old, heavy industries and outdoor storage to a residentially-compatible mixed-use buildings, mid-density housing or parks
- To reduce excess traffic and other nuisances.

Many of the land use changes in the neighborhoods involve replacing developments that are incompatible, such as a student apartment building in the middle of a block of Victorian houses or limiting the outward expansion of a commercial area. Other instances may involve enlarging a riverfront park or adding a nicely designed mixed-use building on the edge of a commercial district.

In the Downtown, many specific ideas were offered by the *Downtown Action Agenda 2001*. The emphasis in that recent plan was to strengthen the economic and land use theme of each of the four districts through redevelopment or infill with appropriate activities, particularly with buildings that occupy the sites intensively, contain more than one type of land use (e.g., offices and apartments), enhance the sidewalk environment, and take advantage of the riverfront. A more detailed description is contained in the Downtown chapter of this analysis of conditions.



Eau Claire has many modestly-sized houses that are well-maintained.

Zoning Regulations

The City of Eau Claire has made several improvements to its zoning ordinance since the 1993 comprehensive plan and now has a set of land development regulations that are adequate to achieve many objectives of that plan. This plan update might suggest additional improvements, though.

The ordinance includes

- Residential districts for a variety of housing types and densities
- A district that allows traditional neighborhood design, including a mixture of land uses, narrower streets, alleys and shorter setbacks.
- Several commercial and industrial districts
- Districts for the protection of wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes and other significant natural features, which is used in conjunction with the conditional use regulations and the floodplain, shoreland and wetland regulations .
- Site plan regulations
- Landscaping regulations
- Multiple-family housing design guidelines.



Banbury Place, formerly a large manufacturing complex, has found new life as offices, housing, manufacturing and child day care.

Land Use Trends and Forces

Demographics

The following forecast of population, households and persons per household was based on the Demographics chapter of the plan.

Table 3-2
Forecast of Households, Population and Jobs, City of Eau Claire, 1990 - 2025

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Households	21,118	24,016	25,200	26,500	27,800	29,000	30,400
Persons / HH	2.69	2.57	2.55	2.53	2.52	2.51	2.50
Population	56,856	61,704	64,600	67,100	70,000	73,000	76,000

Source: SRF Consulting Group; Bureau of the Census.

Table 3-3
Forecast of Households, Nearby Cities, Villages and Towns, 2000 and 2025

Community	Eau Claire Metropolitan Statistical Area		
	2000	2025	
Altoona	2,844	3,875	
Chippewa Falls	5,638		
Wheaton	852		
Union	856		
Brunswick	630		
Washington	2,555		
Seymour	1,108		
Hallie	1,690		
Total	16,173		

Source: US Bureau of the Census

Development Activity

Table 3-4
Housing Units by Planning Sector, 1990, 2000, 2002

Planning Sector	1990	2000	2002
North	3,986	4,587	4,780
South	4,835	6,831	7,474
East	6,654	6,631	6,629
West	6,404	6,846	7,585
Total	21,880	24,895	26,468

Source: City of Eau Claire

Table 3-5
Development Activity Since 1980, Annual Averages

	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2002
New Single-Family Houses	102	152	171
New Multiple-Family Units	156	195	366
Subdivisions	4.3	5.3	7.6
Acres Annexed	147	179	117
Permits for Commercial or Office Buildings	63	88	94
Permits for Industrial or Warehouse Buildings	14	29	27
Permits for Public or Semi-Public Buildings	18	29	32

Source: City of Eau Claire

Table 3-6
City Size (Square Miles), 1980, 1990 and 2000

	1980	1990	2002
Square Miles of City	27.5	30.2	32.7

Source: SRF Consulting Group

Table 3-7
Land Use by Classification, 2002 (Acres)

Classification	Acres	Percentage
Residential	5,939	40
Commercial	1,313	9
Industrial	1,592	11
Park	1,450	10
Public	1,529	10
Semi-Public	248	2
Utility	534	4
Vacant	2,202	15
Total	14,807	

Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission and the City of Eau Claire.

Table 3-8
Average House Sale Prices, 1980, 1990 and 2000

	1980	1990	2000
Average Sale Price for a New Single-Family House	\$ 53,442	\$ 100,595	\$ 140,168
Average Sale Price for All Houses	\$ 41,000	\$ 55,800	\$ 117,784

Source: City of Eau Claire.

Natural Features

Eau Claire is located at the junction of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers and flanked by steep, wooded hills on the northeast, south and southwest. Surrounding the community, land is devoted to farming and dairy operations, open fields, woodlots, wetlands and lakes. These features make for a very attractive community and offer many outdoor recreation activities. The steep slopes pose limitations for urban development, and the woods that cover them provide an attractive green backdrop for the city.

Figure 3-8 illustrates the locations of “environmental corridors” as defined by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, which include wetlands, shorelands, floodplains and steep slopes. Identifying and protecting these elements should provide some protection for wildlife, reduce runoff and erosion damage, help preserve the quality of surface and groundwater and protect aesthetic qualities. The environmental corridors are also recommended for protection in the *Chippewa Falls – Eau Claire Urban Sewer Service Plan*.

Soils and Geology

Soils in the vicinity of Eau Claire were formed by fine, silt-size particles carried along the Eau Claire River basin from melting glaciers over 10,000 years ago and later rearranged by wind and water. Consequently, many soils on the fringe of Eau Claire are suited for supporting buildings and roads but poor for detaining and degrading contaminants from the outflow of septic tanks. In addition, there are many locations around the city where the bedrock is within five feet of the surface of the ground, creating problems for building foundations and, especially, for siting septic tanks. High bedrock is particularly a problem to the northeast, the south (vicinity of County Trunk Highway F) and southeast (between TH 93 and US 53). The implication is that extensive unsewered growth could cause problems for ground and surface water and contaminate shallow wells.

Rivers and Floodplains

The Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers were the primary reasons that Eau Claire came into existence, as they were used to float saw logs to mills near Dells Pond. They provide many scenic and recreational opportunities but, of course, pose some difficulties during periods of high water. Identifying and planning for the proper use of the edges of the rivers is and will continue to be an element of the land use plan and municipal land use regulations. Along the river there are floodplains and floodways that must be protected to minimize the extent of flooding and to protect property.

Wetlands and Lakes

Since there are relatively few wetlands and lakes in the immediate vicinity of Eau Claire, these forms of surface water are not a major planning and development factor. However, Half Moon Lake, located near the center of the community, is an important recreational site.

Agricultural Productivity

Most of the soils adjacent to the City of Eau Claire have been rated as “Local Importance” as opposed to “Prime” or Statewide Importance.” This means that production from row crops tends to be low and that the land is more suited for pasture. These ratings are reflected in the fact that only a few landowners have enrolled their properties in the State Farmland Preservation Program. (Refer to the *Eau Claire Farmland Preservation Plan*.)

Archaeological Resources

There are many significant prehistoric and archaeological sites in and around Eau Claire because of the rivers. Land development should either avoid these locations, or the opportunity should be provided for individual sites to be studied before disturbance occurs.

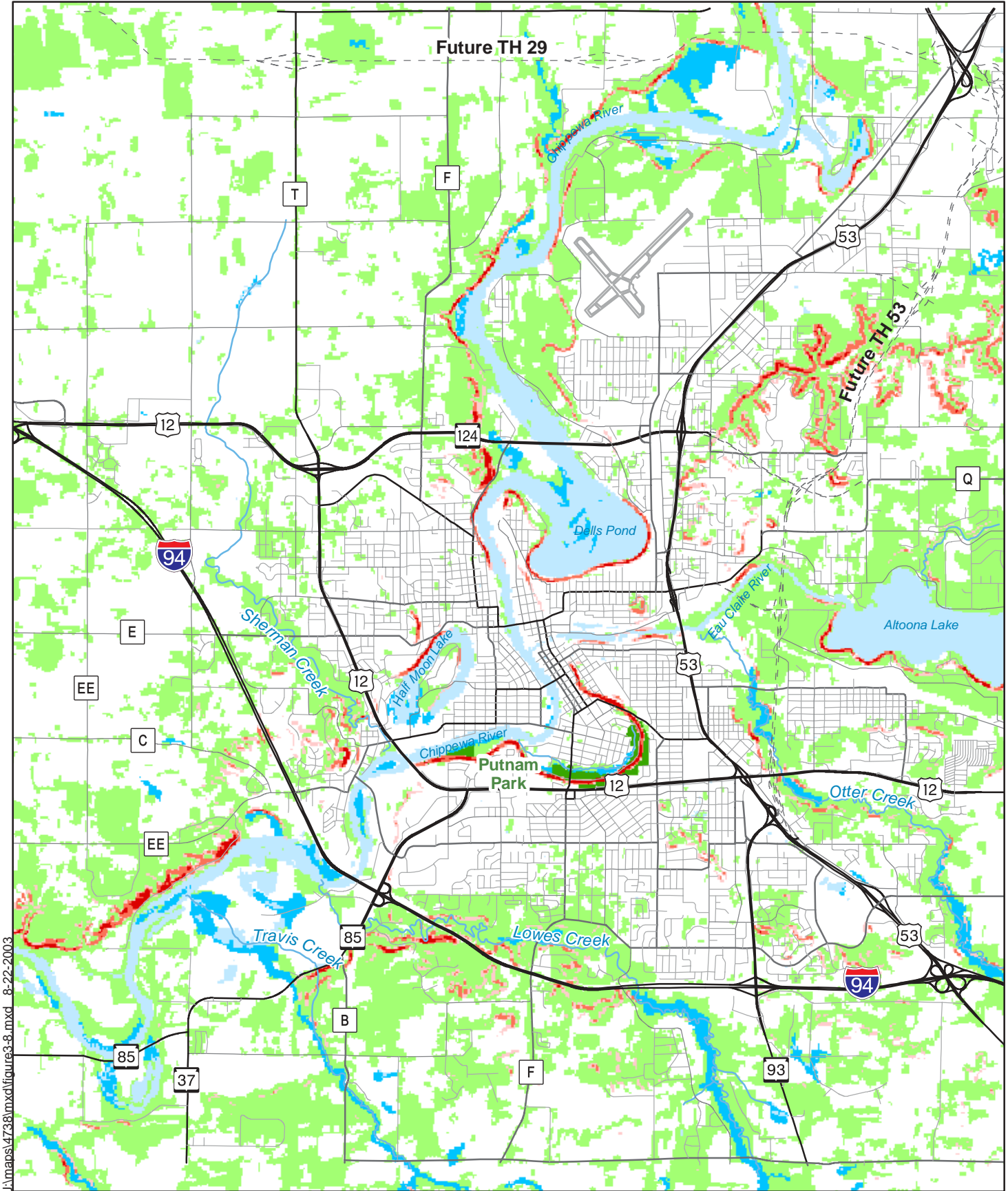
Wellfield Protection

The City has a large wellfield immediately west of the airport. The site and resource are adequately protected by the public ownership of a large tract of land, and no special zoning regulations are needed at this time. The City must comply with a wellhead protection plan prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Urban Growth Opportunities

From the standpoint of natural resources, the most suitable directions for urban expansion around Eau Claire are to the northwest (west of the Chippewa River and north of TH 124) and to the west. Those locations have flat or gently sloping topography, few steep slopes, very few wetlands and soils suited to buildings and roads. There are a few notable exceptions: the steep slopes along the Chippewa River bluffs (some of which are owned by the City for park) and the steep slopes in the extreme southwestern part of the city west of Sherman Creek.

Other areas amenable to expansion from an environmental perspective are portions of Seymour Township south of Burnell Drive, portions of Washington Township west of County Road AA but outside the Otter Creek valley, and portions of Washington Township along the Highway 93 corridor.



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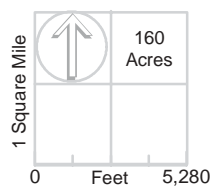
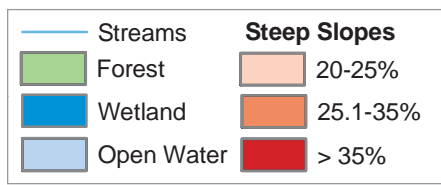


Figure 3-8
Major Natural Features

Road Network

The road network is the most powerful determinant and guide to land development. Since the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, two major new highways have been added to the system in the Eau Claire region, and these will influence growth for several decades in positive or negative ways. It will be the responsibility of the local cities, villages and towns along with the two counties to guide land use into appropriate patterns rather than let the influence of the highway network exert undue influence.

A full and technical description of the Eau Claire road system, including functional and jurisdictional classifications, existing and forecast traffic volumes, and planned improvements is presented in the Transportation Analysis chapter of this plan.

Early Street Network: For approximately the first 100 years of its existence, the road system in Eau Claire was limited to streets radiating from the downtown in conjunction with the grid of local streets in the several neighborhoods surrounding the core. Connections across the city were not continuous or direct but the distances were short and extensive travel by automobile was a recent trend. The idea of long-range street system planning had not yet been widely adopted. Consequently, residential lots were small, streets were interconnected, sidewalks were built along both sides of every street, and shops were small and located in every neighborhood. Evidence of this early street pattern are still very evident, although many improvements have been made to accommodate higher numbers of vehicles.

US 12: With the designation and construction of US Highway 12 along the southern and western sides of the city, growth was pulled in those directions, particularly to the south. A ring of retail businesses and industries followed US 12 and neighborhoods grew on both sides of this route. Eau Claire then also became more easily linked to St. Paul and Madison.

US 53: Later, the north-south US 53 route also pulled development to the southeast and complemented the railroad line as a force for industrial growth to the northeast.

I-94: Interstate 94 supplanted Highway 12 as the major cross-state highway and added to the southerly pull for land development. The major commercial complexes such as Oakwood Mall took advantage of the regional and local accessibility afforded by the combination of I-94, a freeway, and Highway 53, an expressway. Other commercial businesses and services have gravitated to the interchanges and major intersections along this highway and others.

I-94 has also acted somewhat as a barrier or edge to residential development in Eau Claire. First, it was located sufficiently far from the existing neighborhoods that southern neighborhoods encroached on it only in the 1980s and western neighborhoods are just now approaching it. Secondly, the cost of crossing it with roads and utilities has tended to slow the outward pace to growth to the south. The densely wooded hills along I-94 on the south side of the city still make it seem as though the highway is removed from the urban area and provide a highly scenic approach to the community that should be protected.

As mentioned above, there have been two major highway improvements since the last comprehensive plan, and they combine to pull future growth to the north:

The North Crossing (State Trunk Highway 124): This limited-access expressway now provides a direct link from I-94 across the northern side of the urban area, over the Chippewa River, and links to the “old” Highway 53 (Hastings Way) and the future Highway 53, which was under construction as this plan was prepared. Already, the North Crossing has spurred a significant amount of industrial and office growth, and residential neighborhoods are appearing both to its north and south. This trend is expected to continue, as it was supported by the 1993 plan, and utility and park investments have also been made in support. Proximity to I-94 and the Twin Cities, flat, buildable sites and easy access should continue to pull the center of gravity for the Eau Claire region in a northerly and westerly direction.

The New Alignment for US 53: The Wisconsin Department of Transportation determined that it was necessary to build a new US 53 freeway east of Hasting Way because the traffic function original route had been highly degraded as Eau Claire, Altoona and Hallie allowed too many road and driveway intersections. The road could not serve the dual purposes of regional artery and local access. Access to and from the new highway will be much more highly controlled by the State.

After studying several alternatives, the road was aligned in the so-called Inner Corridor, a route endorsed by the City of Eau Claire. Unfortunately, the environmental impacts of this major new road were not insignificant, and that along with the monetary cost, should be a lesson to all communities to properly manage access to all arterial roads.

US 53 is a major north-south route in western Wisconsin between Duluth-Superior and La Crosse, and in combination with I-94 and STH 29 puts the Eau Claire metropolitan area at the strategic hub of a large region.

The future new US 53 freeway will connect to the improved State Trunk Highway 29, the major east-west route across the state, which links to I-94 northwest of Eau Claire and will skirt the south side of Chippewa Falls and run east all the way to Green Bay as a four-lane expressway. It will have an interchange with the North Crossing near the current Olson Drive.

The new US 53 freeway will exert a growth pull to the northeast but to a lesser degree than the North Crossing will to the northwest. This is because the City of Eau Claire does not intend to extend its sanitary sewer or water lines to the newly incorporated Village of Lake Hallie. It has long been the policy of the City to provide sewer service only upon annexation of land or an agreement for future annexation to the City. Nevertheless, the new US 53 freeway will probably accelerate premature low-density development between the cities of Eau Claire and Chippewa Falls.

Other Linkages: Several other less significant road improvements will affect the pattern of land development in and around Eau Claire:

- **Wells Road:** Wells Road was recently improved and connected to Third Street, providing better north-south movement between downtown and the North Crossing.

- **Cameron Street Interchange with I-94:** This planned interchange will provide a new way into and out of the city from I-94 and regional access to a burgeoning west side neighborhood.
- **Cameron and Birch Streets Corridor:** East-west movement across the middle of the city will be enhanced with the I-94 interchange, improvements to Birch Street, a new Eau Claire River bridge and a connection to the new US 53 freeway.
- **County Road 93 Widening:** Upgrading County Road 93 south of I-94 from two lanes to three or four will make this corridor more attractive to commercial and residential developers.
- **The Fifth Avenue (South) Bridge:** A bridge over the Chippewa River and with an elevated road through the University campus has long been advocated by some transportation planners but opposed by many residents and other interests. Although this bridge is shown on the 1993 plan, it seems unlikely that it ever be built.
- **Galloway Street Extension to Birch Street:** This short linkage will reduce heavy truck and other traffic from Birch Street and reduce those effects on the North Side Hill Neighborhood.
- **County Trunk Highway T:** With its interchange at the North Crossing, intersection with STH 29 and alignment with Clairemont Avenue (US 12), this road will assume increased importance as a corridor for traffic, industry and housing.
- **County Trunk Highway TT:** Currently a minor crossing of I-94, County Trunk Highway TT could become much more important supplementary route to future residential neighborhoods west of I-94 (in conjunction with Cameron Street and County Trunk Highways EE, C and CC).

Utilities Systems

Sanitary Sewer System

The City of Eau Claire and the City of Chippewa Falls are the only two governmental entities in this region that own sewage treatment plants and, thus, control the pattern and timing of system growth. They may only approve line extensions within the Sewage Service Area. The treatment plant that once existed in Altoona has been closed.

Eau Claire Sewer Service Policy

The following section is an important aspect of the planning analysis.

Current Sewer Extension Policy: Since the 1970s, it has been the policy of the City of Eau Claire that property may receive sanitary sewer service only if it within the City. Thus, owners of perimeter properties must petition the City for annexation and have their petition approved by the City and not successfully challenged by the Town. The reasoning for this policy has been:

1. So the City can recover its cost for the treatment plant and interceptor lines, and the maintenance and replacement of those facilities
2. So the City can manage the intensity and timing of fringe development and, thus, the flow through its system
3. So that the City can coordinate perimeter growth with the systems of roads, parks, drainage and other public facilities and services
4. So that the City can manage the quality of perimeter urban development through its zoning ordinance, which is more demanding than the regulations of the adjacent Towns.
5. So that the City can enjoy the benefits of tax base growth
6. So that the City can include in its population and civic life those new residents and business owners.

The City of Eau Claire won the right to uphold this policy through a legal challenge in the 1970s that went all the way to the US Supreme Court.

Benefits of the Current Policy: By following that policy, the City has been able to promote a coordinated and cost-effective pattern of urban growth. The City believes that its coordinated and comprehensive management of urban growth, plus that of the Cities of Chippewa Falls and Altoona, has helped make this metropolitan region competitive with other similarly-sized metropolitan areas in terms of economic development and quality of life. Additionally, the City believes that this policy has minimized inconsistent, haphazard, unrealistic and competitive expansion that would have been without regard for present and probable future development in the overall public interest.

Changes in the Town of Hallie: In 2002, the Town of Hallie petitioned the State of Wisconsin and was incorporated as the Village of Lake Hallie, having met the standards prescribed in Section 66.0207, Wisconsin Statutes. That meant, among other things, that landowners in the new Village could no longer petition the City of Eau Claire for annexation. The Town stated in its incorporation petition that it could serve its pattern of low-density development with on-site sewage disposal systems.

Without a change in the City's sewer service extension policy, the only way that the Village of Lake Hallie could receive public sanitary sewer service would be either (a) detachment and incorporation of property from the Village to the City, (b) the City being compelled to serve the Village by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources or the courts or (c) the Village constructing its own system with State permission.

In any case, the City of Eau Claire will no longer be growing into what was the Town of Hallie. That may be for the best, however, since the Hastings Way (US 53) corridor in the Village is replete with urban design and development shortcomings and problems.

Other Adjacent Towns: Portions of the Towns of Seymour, Washington, New Brunswick and Union are more favorable and pose fewer difficulties – but even likely urban growth locations in those Towns have been compromised by large-lot subdivisions that cannot economically be served with sewer and water. In fact, in the Towns of Seymour and Washington, more than half of the land in the Sewer Service Area has been used for large-lot housing, or to a lesser extent, businesses and industry.

Annexation

Past Pattern of Annexations

The City of Eau Claire annexed 3,492 acres of land between 1980 and 2003 or an average of 152 acres per year, to provide locations for attractive urban investments with public sanitary sewer and water utilities, police and fire service, parks, street maintenance and other municipal benefits to greatly increased the value of the annexed land. The locations of the annexations that occurred between 1990 and 2003 are illustrated by Figure 3-9.

Summary of State Annexation Statutes

Wisconsin laws pertaining to annexation are complicated but essential to the efficient and economic growth of the City and the metropolitan area. Appendix A provides a layman's summary of those statutes. In simple terms, land may only be annexed to a City only if the landowner asks the City. It is very difficult for a Wisconsin City to successfully annex land unilaterally. This sometimes makes it difficult for a city to plan for and implement efficient urban growth, leading to higher costs for the public and a less economic metropolitan area.

Redevelopment Activity

Land redevelopment occurs continuously in an older city such as Eau Claire. Most of it is financed entirely by private investment but many difficult or key sites are assisted by the Eau Redevelopment Authority, an arm of the City.

In 2003, the major publicly-assisted redevelopment action was the North Barstow District. Near the confluence of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers the City had prepared a plan and the Eau Claire Redevelopment Authority began to acquire blighted, obsolescent or incompatible properties and remediated the soil contamination caused by a former heavy industry. The plan called for the creation of a major riverfront park, several new office buildings, retail businesses, housing and new streets.

Summary of Areas Amenable to Urban Growth

Based on the preceding analysis, several locations have been identified by the following text and map as likely locations for municipal urban growth over the next 20 years:

There are several major locations that are suited for urban growth in and around Eau Claire by virtue of the fact that roads, sewer and water are available or could be reasonably extended, are not encumbered by very-large-lot housing or similar land use, and are not excluded from annexation to the City. The following locations should be considered when preparing the land use and development staging plans for the next twenty years. These locations should be further evaluated on the basis of sewer and water service, parks, fire response and landowner interest during this comprehensive planning process.

Infill and Redevelopment: There are small and scattered opportunities for infill and redevelopment across Eau Claire in locations that are fully serviced by roads and utilities and have nearby land development. Several opportunities are available downtown. Near Oakwood Mall there is a substantial amount of land still available, and this area could devolve into a major multi-use urban center with retail businesses, offices, and attached housing. Other sites are in every part of the city, and new possibilities will occur as time goes by. Such locations, especially in and near the downtown, should be a high priority for urban growth.

County Highway T Corridor: The County Highway T corridor, beginning near Truax Boulevard and moving north all the way into Wheaton Township, has excellent access, visibility and available utilities. Industrial growth has been stronger than anticipated, and housing is a possibility to the east.

Public investments in roads and utilities have made this land highly valuable and eminently suited for conversion to urban uses in the near future. Intensive office, industrial and commercial development should be pursued in locations with the best access to the highway, with residential neighborhoods further away.

Jeffers Road to the Chippewa River: East of the Gateway Business Park, the Jeffers Road corridor all the way to the County border has potential for housing development, especially for sites overlooking the river or near the North Community Park.

Sherman Creek to I-94: This is a natural growth location for Eau Claire as it is inside the freeway border, adjacent to existing neighborhoods and served by Clairemont Avenue and Cameron Street. Sewer and water are available but much of the most attractive land has been used inefficiently on very-large-lot housing. Several large tracts remain, both north and south of Cameron Street, but Union Township must cooperate on growth controls for proper land use to occur. Housing demand and market strength on the west side of Eau Claire has been weaker than in the south (the traditionally strongest direction of growth), the northeast or the northwest.

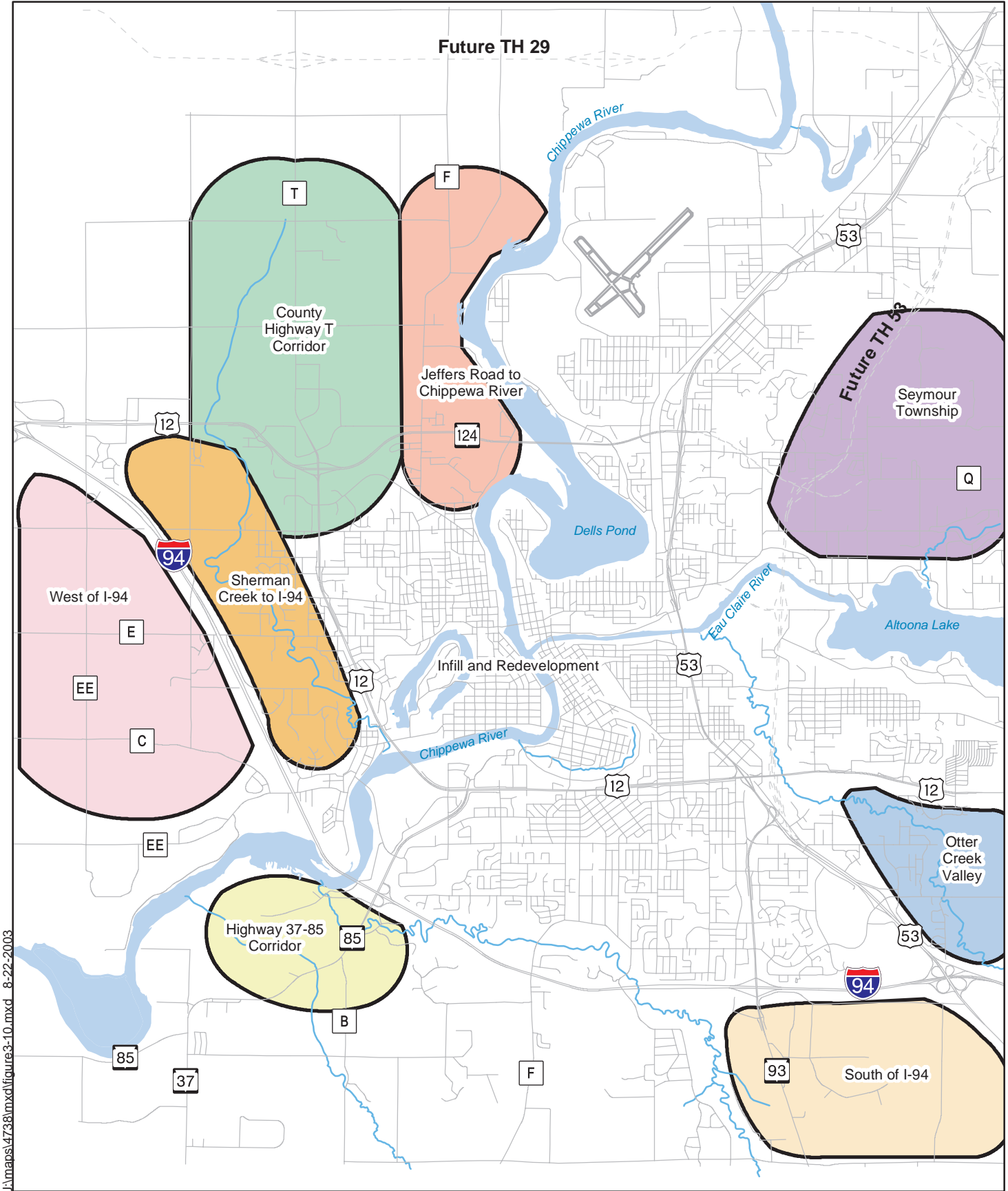


Figure 3-10

**Candidate Locations
for Urban Growth**



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West of I-94: A major longer-term growth location is west of the freeway in the vicinity of Cameron Street. Despite one or two large-lot unsewered subdivisions, there are still large open tracts. Building an interchange at Cameron Street would open the area, and even offer possibilities for office or retail business land use. Once again, commitment is needed on a long-term development plan that is responsible to the needs of the region, preserves farming until urbanization and maximizes the development value of the property.

South of I-94 in the Town of Washington: The land south of I-94 from Highway 37 on the west to Otter Creek on the east, being wooded and hilly, is some of the most attractive for housing of the entire Eau Claire region. It would be very useful to the City to be able to grow in this direction, as Eau Claire needs to diversify its housing stock on the upper end of the price range. Unfortunately, there are several constraints:

- Access across the freeway is limited
- A sanitary sewer under the freeway is needed along with one or more lift stations near Otter Creek
- Many key sites north of County Highway II (and even more within the Urban Sewer Service Area) has been used for very-large-lot unsewered housing, blocking urban growth entirely or making it more expensive than ever
- Business opportunities along the soon-to-be-improved Highway 93 has been lost to strip development while compromising the traffic function of the road
- Some of the hilltops would require booster pumps for water pressure.
- A successful annexation petition is required.

The Highway 37-85 Corridor in the Town of Brunswick: The Chippewa River could be an attractive amenity for housing but much of the area between the river and Highway 37-85 has been mined for gravel and/or is in the river floodplain.

Otter Creek Valley: There are several large undeveloped tracts near Otter Creek south of US Highway 12, both west and east of the creek, that are in the Urban Sewer Service Area in the Town of Washington. The City of Altoona has jurisdiction over most of the land between US 12 and Otter Creek but any potential annexations from areas east of the creek in the Town of Washington are yet to be determined. The two Cities and the Town should determine who can best serve urban development with roads and utilities before such improvements are imminent. Access back to Eau Claire is limited by the creek and US Highway 53.

Town of Seymour: Urban residential growth northeast into the wooded hills of Seymour Township would have been a natural market choice but nearly the entire western half of the township has been chopped into very-large semi-urban, semi-rural lots for unsewered single-family houses. Despite being in the Urban Sewer Service Area and having splendid access from the new US Highway 53 and the extension of the North Crossing, nearly all significant development opportunities have been greatly diminished. Much of the land was simply split into long narrow parcels served by the existing county or town roads. It will be a difficult and costly process to assemble subdivision tracts from numerous narrow large lots, each with a different owner.

Forecast of Acreage Needed for Development from 2000 to 2025

The following table indicates that approximately 3,700 acres of land will be needed for Eau Claire municipal development between 2000 and 2025. Because there are approximately 2,000 acres of land in the City as of January 2003 that were developable but not yet built upon, the required net increase in acreage is estimated to be at least 1,700 acres over that 25 year period. Approximately 25 to 50 percent more land than that should be planned for in order to maintain a competitive supply in the market.

Assumptions

- **Rate of Growth:** The assumed rate of growth is consistent with that of the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in their 1995 Long-Range Transportation Plan.
- **Housing Vacancy Rate:** The assumed housing vacancy rate is consistent with the trend of the past two decades.
- **Housing Density:** The average number of new housing units per gross acre was estimated by the planning consultant based on observed data from other cities.
- **Housing Ratio:** The percentage of growth assumed to be housing (as opposed to commercial, industrial, public and other land uses) is consistent with local trends and national surveys.
- **Current Supply:** The number of acres of land that are presently in the City but not developed was measured from the 2002 map of land use prepared by the West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

Table 3-9							
Forecast of Households and Housing Units							
	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Households	21,118	24,016	25,200	26,500	27,800	29,000	30,400
Housing Units	21,880	24,895	26,208	27,560	28,912	30,160	31,616
Change		3,015	1,313	1,352	1,352	1,248	1,456
Assumed annual increase in households:				1.1%			
Assumed housing vacancy rate:				4%			
Table 3-10							
Forecast of Serviced Land Needed							
		2000 to	2005 to	2010 to	2015 to	2020 to	
		2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	Total
Housing		286	294	294	272	317	1,464
Comm., Ind., Public, Other		429	442	442	408	476	2,196
Gross Total Needed		715	736	736	679	793	3,659
Minus Undeveloped Land							2,000
Net Acreage Needed							1,659
Average new units per acre				4.5			
Percent of growth as redevelopment:				2%			

Source: SRF Consulting Group, Inc., 2003.

Appendix A: Summary of Wisconsin Annexation Powers of a City

Methods of Annexation

Wisconsin law makes it difficult for a city to annex land from an adjacent town. Under either of the two methods described below, a majority of the landowners in the annexation area must approve, in some cases more than once.

Annexation Initiated by Electors

Annexation of land to a city by petition from the landowner(s) may be accomplished by either of two methods:

- a. If petitioned to the city by at least one-half of the landowners of the territory to be annexed, either in area or real property value, and two-thirds of the City Council approves the petition
- b. If at least half of the owners of real property either in area or value petition for a referendum and a majority of the electors in the territory vote to approve the annexation. The state Department of Administration may advise the town and the city whether it thinks the annexation is in the public interest (defined by what jurisdiction could best provide services and the shape of the territory to be annexed).

The statutes governing annexation are found in 66.0217 through 66.0219 of Wisconsin Statutes.

Annexation by Referendum Initiated by the City

The City Council by two-thirds majority may vote to apply to the circuit court for an order for an annexation referendum. The court may approve that application unless a protest petition is filed with the court by:

- a. The owners of more than one-half of the real property in assessed value in the territory proposed to be annexed, or
- b. A number of qualified electors residing in the territory equal to at least a majority of the votes cast for governor in the territory at the last gubernatorial election.

If the courts finds the protest petition to be insufficient, it shall hear all parties for or against the application.

If the court, after the hearing, is satisfied the requirements have been met, it may order an election on the question of referendum. If a majority of the electors in the territory in question approve of the annexation, the territory shall be annexed to the city.

Appendix B: Extraterritorial Plat Approval Powers of a City

Extraterritorial Subdivision Review

If a subdivision plat is proposed in a part of a town within 3 miles of a City of the First, Second or Third Class, the final plat may not be recorded unless it has been approved by the town, the County and the City. Under State law, a “subdivision” is defined as the act of creating, by division, five or more parcels of land that are 1.5 acres in size or smaller, including those created by successive divisions within five years. The City of Eau Claire and Eau Claire County have modified this definition by local ordinance to include all parcels that are 20 acres in size or smaller.

The City and County also require certified survey maps for any division of land into 4 or fewer parcels 20 acres in size or smaller. Under agreement by the City and County, all lots within the City’s 3-mile plat review area must be at least 1.5 acres in size or larger if served with private septic system. The City Plan Commission may also require resubdividable lots for any lot which is greater than 1.5 acres in size if it is in an area planned for sanitary sewer.

In addition, the Wisconsin Supreme Court declared in a 2003 decision in the case of Wood vs. the City of Madison: “we conclude that Wis. Stat. ch. 236 (1999-2000) does authorize a municipality to reject a preliminary plat under its extraterritorial jurisdictional authority based upon a subdivision ordinance that considers the plat’s proposed use.” That ruling gives Wisconsin cities broad new powers to reject proposed subdivisions in adjacent towns out to three miles from its border.

Extraterritorial Zoning

A City and an adjacent Town may cooperate on planning and zoning for that part of a Town within three miles of the City. A City Council may create and adopt a plan and zoning regulations for the area within three miles of its borders if:

- a. The area is contiguous to the City, and
- b. The City publishes its intentions to do so in the general newspaper and notifies the town clerk, and
- c. The City and the Town each appoint three members to a joint planning committee for the territory outside the City (the town is required to appoint three members and the city three members), and
- d. Any such plan or zoning regulations are approved by a majority of the six person joint planning committee after public hearing on the matter.